



Darfur Australia Network Briefing Paper

Darfuri Refugees Stranded in Iraq¹

April 2007



IMAGE: Darfuri Refugees in Camp K70, Iraq

Executive Summary

This Briefing Paper summarises the present situation faced by a group of 150 Darfuri refugees currently living in K70 Refugee Camp, Iraq. The flight of this group of refugees from Darfur and their subsequent ongoing displacement and persecution over a period of 15 years is documented. An assessment is then made of the current situation faced by this group, including immediate threats to their personal security. A list of recommendations is presented.

Sudanese Refugees in Iraq

It has come to the attention of the Darfur Australia Network (DAN) that a number of persons displaced by the ongoing conflict in Sudan are presently living in refugee camps in Iraq. Such persons are the victims of two wars, fleeing conflict in Sudan, only to find themselves the unwitting victims of a second armed conflict when war broke out in Iraq. While the total number of Sudanese refugees currently living in Iraq is unknown, DAN has been able to obtain information, through the U.S. Marines, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other sources about one group of approximately 150 refugees at Refugee Camp K70, near Camp Korean Village, Rutba in Anbar Governorate, Iraq. The Darfur Australia Network is in direct contact with this group.

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Historical Background

The refugees now living in Camp K70 fled persecution in Darfur approximately fifteen years ago, as individuals and in small groups, entering Iraq prior to the initiation of hostilities in that country². The refugees attempted to leave Iraq in May 2005 after suffering harassment and persecution by armed groups³, but were denied access to asylum at the Jordanian border⁴. The relief organisation Iraqi Red Crescent then led the group back to a barren area of land around Camp Korean Village. At this site (now known as Camp K70), the refugees began to construct a make-shift refugee camp. The group has been stranded in this insecure and unstable area of Iraq since May 2005⁵. There are currently 140–150 Darfuri refugees at K70 Camp⁶.

Refugee Status Determination

The Iraq-based Mercy Hands Legal Aid and Information Centre (LAIC) has compiled a database of information regarding the Darfuri refugees in Iraq, and has investigated their prospective legal claims in conjunction with the Iraqi Ministry of Displaced and Migrants (MoDM), the Iraqi Residence Directorate and the UNHCR. In December 2005, the UNHCR registered the names of 138 members of this group, and listed the group as a 'Population of Concern'⁷.

² Chief Warrant Officer John M. Wills, Civil Affairs team leader, detachment 4/2, 4th Civil Affairs Group, U.S. Marines, cited in Parish, T. (2006) "Marines bring smiles, relief, hope for future to refugees", available at <http://www.marines.mil/marinelink/mcn2000.nsf/0/a8938862821c1d0f85257247004cb7ab?OpenDocument>, accessed on 20/04/07.

³ Sgt Godwin Fenuku, 1st Light Armoured Reconnaissance Battalion, 1st Marine Division, U.S. Marines, quoted in Anon (n.d.) "Marine reaches out to fellow Africans at refugee camp". Unknown source. See also "Emergency Humanitarian Assistance Program Activities: Humanitarian Assistance to Sudanese Refugees in Anbar Governorate", Mercy Hands website [Accessed 23 March 2007]. Full text available at <http://www.mercyhands.net/home/eractivities10.htm>.

⁴ Chief Warrant Officer John M. Wills, Civil Affairs team leader, detachment 4/2, 4th Civil Affairs Group, U.S. Marines, cited in Parish, T. (2006) "Marines bring smiles, relief, hope for future to refugees", available at <http://www.marines.mil/marinelink/mcn2000.nsf/0/a8938862821c1d0f85257247004cb7ab?OpenDocument>, accessed on 20/04/07.

⁵ Parish, T. (2006) "Marines bring smiles, relief, hope for future to refugees", available at <http://www.marines.mil/marinelink/mcn2000.nsf/0/a8938862821c1d0f85257247004cb7ab?OpenDocument>, accessed on 20/04/07.

⁶ The figure of 140 is provided by Mercy Hands, a local non-government organisation that has been delivering humanitarian assistance and monitoring the conditions of refugees and internally displaced persons in Iraq. See "Emergency Humanitarian Assistance Program Activities: Humanitarian Assistance to Sudanese Refugees in Anbar Governorate", Mercy Hands website [Accessed 23 March 2007]. Full text available at <http://www.mercyhands.net/home/eractivities10.htm>. United States Marines operating in the area have reported a total of 150 Darfuris at the camp: See Anon (n.d.) "Marine reaches out to fellow Africans at refugee camp". Unknown source.

⁷ *UNHCR Iraq Operation: Supplementary Appeal 2006*, p 3. Full text of this document available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/partners/opendoc.pdf?tbl=PARTNERS&id=4458c0f22>

Situation Assessment – Immediate Threats

The situation facing the Darfuri refugees in Iraq is highly precarious and highly insecure. There are a number of immediate high-risk threats to the security of these persons. The U.S. Marines have described the area around Camp K70 as “a hotbed of insurgent activity”¹⁵. Several U.S. Marines, in separate reports, have expressed fears that insurgent groups will attempt to recruit the Sudanese for the purposes of fighting Coalition forces¹⁶. In written statements, the refugees themselves expressed grave fears that “we [are] exposed to any attack at any time and no one can protect us”¹⁷. One refugee has already reported the death of two family members at the hands of Iraqi insurgent groups¹⁸. The refugees at Camp K70 are clearly exposed to an unacceptably high and ongoing risk to their personal security.

Situation Assessment – Camp Conditions

The immediate security risks faced by these refugees are compounded by a range of issues surrounding the conditions of the K70 Camp itself. Briefly summarised, the environmental conditions at the Camp are harsh, and the available infrastructure is inadequate to provide a satisfactory minimal standard of living. While no satisfactory assessment of the health status of these refugees has been made, anecdotal accounts by members of the U.S. Marines and by relief agencies working on-the-ground suggest that the health and hygiene situation at Camp K70 is dire¹⁹.

The ability of these refugees to access livelihoods, adequate shelter, food and water is precarious at best. The 15th U.S. Marine Expeditionary Unit has, apparently of their own initiative, been providing some emergency supplies, including “cold-weather clothing and shelter tents... pre-packaged meals and bottled water” to this group of refugees on a monthly basis since June 2005²⁰. Iraq-based non-government organisation Mercy Hands has also been providing food, non-food items and healthcare to these refugees on an *ad hoc* basis since September 2005. The UNHCR has recommended the delivery of emergency assistance to these refugees by the Mercy Hands organisations²¹. There are no robust plans for improving the livelihoods of these refugees, and no assurances that assistance of any form will continue. Moreover, there are no foreseeable prospects for any significant improvement in health and hygiene conditions at Camp K70.

¹⁵ Anon (n.d.) “Marine reaches out to fellow Africans at refugee camp”. Unknown source.

¹⁶ See, for example, Anon (n.d.) “Marine reaches out to fellow Africans at refugee camp”. Unknown source. See also Sgt Godwin Fenuku, 1st Light Armoured Reconnaissance Battalion, 1st Marine Division, U.S. Marines, quoted in Anon (n.d.) “Marine reaches out to fellow Africans at refugee camp”. Unknown source.

¹⁷ Handwritten statement from a resident of Camp K70, made available to the Darfur Australia Network.

¹⁸ Handwritten statement from a resident of Camp K70, made available to the Darfur Australia Network.

¹⁹ Sgt Godwin Fenuku, 1st Light Armoured Reconnaissance Battalion, 1st Marine Division, U.S. Marines, quoted in Anon (n.d.) “Marine reaches out to fellow Africans at refugee camp”. Unknown source.

²⁰ Parish, T. (2006) “Marines bring smiles, relief, hope for future to refugees”, available at <http://www.marines.mil/marinelink/mcn2000.nsf/0/a8938862821c1d0f85257247004cb7ab?OpenDocument>, accessed on 20/04/07.

²¹ UNHCR (2006) *Iraq Operation: Supplementary Appeal*, p 3. Full text of this document available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/partners/opedoc.pdf?tbl=PARTNERS&id=4458c0f22>

First-hand communications from refugees at the camp indicate that at least three people, including one child, have already died as a result of the harsh and unsatisfactory camp conditions. In the absence of rapid and effective international humanitarian assistance, it is probable that further deaths will follow.

Prospects for Resettlement in Foreign Jurisdictions

While the applications have been made by a number of advocacy organisations to the U.S. State Department, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and to counterpart departments of the governments of the United Kingdom and Canada for the immediate resettlement of these Darfuri refugees to a suitable, secure and safe location, no response has yet been forthcoming²².

Summary

The circumstances facing this group of refugees are clearly exceptional and, as such, invite an exceptional response. The Darfur Australia Network considers the following factors, *inter alia*, to be of particular importance in formulating an appropriate response:

- These refugees have suffered exceptional hardship and have been the unwitting and persecuted victims of two armed conflicts, first in Sudan and then in Iraq
- These refugees have been denied asylum by Jordan and are consequently unable to access any durable security or protection
- The conditions and circumstances in which these refugees are living clearly fail to meet even the most basic humanitarian standards; there is no reason to expect an improvement in these circumstances
- These refugees have been registered with the UNHCR, and are considered by that agency to constitute a 'Population of Concern'
- The small size and easy identifiability of the group makes special intervention a realistic and viable option.

²² Parish, T. (2006) "Marines bring smiles, relief, hope for future to refugees", available at <http://www.marines.mil/marinelink/mcn2000.nsf/0/a8938862821c1d0f85257247004cb7ab?OpenDocument>, accessed on 20/04/07.

Recommendations

Considering these factors, the Darfur Australia Network recommends that

1. The Commonwealth of Australia expeditiously process the Applications for Offshore Humanitarian Visas (Refugee and Humanitarian (Class XB) Visa) submitted by members of this group.
2. The Commonwealth of Australia pursue all available diplomatic means to ensure the resettlement of all members of this group to a safe and secure location while their Applications for Offshore Humanitarian Visas are processed.
3. The Jordanian Government grant immediate asylum to these refugees through the Temporary Protection Regime (TPR), as it has for many thousands of refugees of Iraqi nationality. The Commonwealth of Australia must pursue all diplomatic means to influence and guide the Jordanian Government in this undertaking.



IMAGE: Darfuri refugees at Camp K70 preparing a grave for a recently-deceased girl who died as a result of the harsh environmental condition.