



Office of the Special Representative  
of the Secretary-General for  
**CHILDREN AND  
ARMED CONFLICT**

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**PRESS RELEASE**

IRAQ

### **An Intolerable Situation for Iraqi Children**

**Amman/ Baghdad/ New York, 25 April 2008** - The Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy, in concluding her visit to Iraq of 20-25 April, stated that children of Iraq are the silent victims of the on-going violence.

"Many of them no longer go to school, many are recruited for violent activities or detained in custody, they lack access to the most basic services and manifest a wide range of psychological symptoms from the violence in their everyday lives". Increasing cases of gender based violence are also reported. "It is an intolerable situation" she said. She called on religious, political, military and community leaders to send one clear message to Iraqi children: "Stay out of the violence and go back to school".

Ms. Coomaraswamy noted that only 50% of primary school children are attending school, down from 80% in 2005. Only 40% have access to clean drinking water and there is a continuing possibility of outbreaks of cholera. Since 2004, an increasing number of children have been recruited into various militias and insurgent groups, including as suicide bombers, and approximately 1,500 are known to be held in detention facilities. Humanitarian access to communities is severely hindered in many parts of the country, depriving children of humanitarian assistance. More than half of Iraqi IDPs and refugees are children and also face a great deal of difficulties in their new places of settlement whether in Iraq or in neighbouring countries. The international community should assist the host countries in ensuring that the rights of children are protected and that they have access to basic services such as education and health care.

Ms. Coomaraswamy strongly urged all parties to the conflict in Iraq to strictly adhere to international humanitarian standards for the protection of children and to immediately release any children under the age of 18 years who are associated with their forces in any way. She called on all parties to strictly adhere to international human rights standards regarding juvenile justice provisions, and to invest in alternative measures to detention, including prevention and restorative justice processes.

The Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict called on all parties to give free and independent access to humanitarian workers and she called upon the Iraqi Government, the US Government and the international community to engage in political and diplomatic initiatives to secure safe access for humanitarian assistance so that agencies like UNICEF, UNHCR, OCHA and WFP are able to reach children in all parts of Iraq without hindrance. She urged all humanitarian agencies, subject to security considerations, to be present and active in Iraq. She reiterated her call to the religious and community leaders of Iraq to persuade their communities to keep children out of the conflict.

“Let peace in Iraq begin with the protection of children” said Ms. Coomaraswamy.

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