

UNHCR Special Envoy Angelina Jolie visits Syrian refugees and Iraqi returnees in Iraq

Domiz Refugee Camp, Iraq, 16 September 2012 -- UNHCR Special Envoy Angelina Jolie today hailed the Iraqi governments willingness to host Syrian refugees fleeing violence and expressed her hope that all Syrians seeking asylum in Iraq would be welcomed. I want to highlight the noble efforts of the Iraqi government and the people of Iraq to support Syrian refugees, said Ms Jolie. At this juncture, it is critical that Iraq receives urgent international support and continues to welcome refugees across its borders.

In the Iraqi capital on Saturday, Ms. Jolie met with senior government officials and spent time with Iraqis, until recently refugees in Syria, who have returned to Iraq after fleeing violence in their places of former refuge.

She spent today meeting with Syrian refugees in the Domiz camp in northern Iraq. She also met officials of the Kurdistan Regional Government, including the Prime Minister Mr. Nechervan Barzani, the Interior Minister Mr. Karim Sinjari the Governor of Erbil Mr. Nawzad Hadi and Governor of Dohuk Mr. Tamar Ramadhan. Many of the officials she met were former refugees. We know how it feels, one official told Jolie.

In her meetings Saturday in Baghdad with the Minister of Foreign Affairs Hoshyar Zebari and the Minister of Displacement and Migration Dindar Najman Shafeeq and on Sunday with Kurdistan Regional Government officials in Dohuk, Ms. Jolie pledged further UNHCR support for the government in receiving and hosting additional Syrian refugees as their numbers rapidly increase.

This was her fourth and final stop of a tour of countries neighbouring Syria, where more than 260,000 Syrian refugees have been registered since the conflict began in March 2011. Earlier this week, Ms Jolie visited Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey with UN High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres. They both pledged continued support and emphasized the life-saving importance of maintaining open borders and hosting Syrians in need.

This is Ms Jolie's fourth visit to Iraq. Some 1.3 million Iraqis remain displaced in their country and the government has made it a priority to improve their standard of living and find solutions for them through voluntary return to their places of origin or through local integration.

Combined with the new influx of Syrian refugees and the sudden return of over 30,000 of their own citizens, the complexity of the situation and the challenges for this country just emerging from conflict cannot be overstated, Ms. Jolie said.