



Jordan's Statement on the Iraqi Refugee Crisis

To the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe
April 2008

**Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Allow me first to thank you for inviting me to this important hearing, which will allow us all to share views and exchange ideas on this critical issue that is of high concern not only Jordan and our region, but also the international community as a whole.

Today, I am going to share with you a number of challenges that are facing Jordan as a result of the influx of Iraqis to Jordan, as well as some of the efforts that have been put forward by the Government to host hundreds of thousands of Iraqis. I will also highlight the direct and indirect impact being caused on our economy quoting some of the estimations that have been made as a result of housing thousands of our Iraqi neighbors.

Under the directions of His Majesty King Abudllah II, the Government of Jordan has taken a number of measures to reduce the financial and social hardships facing Iraqis residing in Jordan aimed at providing them with better standards of living. These measures have been taken, despite the magnitude of challenges facing our own economy, including the rise in international oil prices and its implication on our budget and current account deficits, high inflation rates, the impact, lack of natural resources, and high poverty and unemployment rates. These measures can be summarized as follows:

- 1. Completing the Fafu Study on the demographic characteristics of Iraqis residing in Jordan:** Upon a request from the Government of Jordan, the Norwegian Institute (Fafu) conducted a study that was published in November 2007, revealing that the majority of Iraqis are concentrated in the main cities of Amman, Zarqa, and Irbid benefiting from the infrastructure in these cities and placing further pressures in various sectors particularly energy, water, health, education, and security. The study also showed that the majority of Iraqis currently live on savings or receive transfers, thus are at risk of becoming vulnerable with the depletion of savings, and are becoming more reliant on public services such as education and health.
- 2. Allowing Iraqi students to register at schools:** The Government of Jordan has taken the decision to allow all Iraqi students to register in Jordanian public schools regardless of their legal status. To date, this has resulted in around 24 thousand students registering in our school system. However, this number is expected to increase, as registration has not been limited to a specific period of time in order to continue to offer education to all Iraqi students residing in Jordan. Moreover, the Ministry of Education is also holding entry level exams for students who were interrupted from their education and may not have the necessary documentation to prove their education level. In addition, Iraqi students are able to take advantage of the available illiteracy, health care and nutrition programs on an equal footing with Jordanian students.

3. **Receiving Iraqi patients in public hospitals and healthcare centers:** The Government of Jordan has reduced charges for Iraqi patients across the Kingdom, treating them as uninsured Jordanians, who receive subsidized health care treatment in primary health care centers. The Government has also allowed patients referred by International Agencies and Non-Governmental Organizations to receive treatment in public hospitals at par with Jordanians.
4. **Waving residency fines:** The Government of Jordan has issued on 13 February 2008 a 100% waiver to Iraqi residents who wish to leave the country, and a 50% waiver to Iraqi residents who wish to stay in Jordan. It is estimated that this will cost the Government around US\$273 million, with approximately 370,000 Iraqis having overstayed their residency for periods of up to two years.
5. **Easing visa application procedures:** The Government of Jordan has recently signed an agreement with a private courier (TNT) that will facilitate and ease the visa application process for Iraqis through establishing eight offices in Baghdad and other major cities, and stipulates a fast processing treatment for humanitarian cases.
6. **Facilitating the flow of passengers and goods between the two countries:** The Government is in the process of finalizing the tender documents for establishing a new border center at the Al-Karameh Border in order to facilitate the flow of passengers and goods between both countries. The Government has also laid the foundations for establishing a free zone at this border. Moreover, several services will be provided by the King Hussein bin Talal Economic Zone in Mafraq towards facilitating the reconstruction efforts in Iraq.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

While Jordan recognizes the important role that the international community plays in assisting Iraqis who are currently residing in neighboring countries, we also realize the importance of continuing all political efforts towards improving the security situation in Iraq to allow the safe return of all Iraqis to their homeland.

Moreover, and although Jordan appreciates the contributions that have been made by the donor community thus far towards mitigating the impact of hosting Iraqis, we continue to feel that a substantial scaling up of assistance is required in order to support Jordan and other countries that play an important role in hosting a large number of Iraqis. While it is difficult to measure the indirect impact, the Government of Jordan has estimated the direct impact that has resulted from hosting thousands of Iraqis neighbors at over US\$1.6 billion. This represents an additional financial burden to address the rising pressures that are being placed on the various sectors in Jordan, particularly education, health, water and sanitation, energy, transport and security.

- 1) **Education:** The education sector is facing further pressures due to the increased number of Iraqis residing in Jordan. According to a recent study by the UNHCR/UNICEF, it is estimated that over the coming two to three years a total of 100,000 Iraqi students will be enrolled in Jordanian public schools, particularly after the Government's recent decision to allow all Iraqi students to attend public schools regardless of their residency status. This represents an increase of around 9 percent of the total number of currently enrolled students, which, in turn, requires increasing the number of teachers, classes, labs, and other facilities in order to continue to provide Iraqi students with the necessary education. In order to meet this increasing demand on public education, while at the same time maintaining the quality of education

provided to students, it is estimated that over US\$290 million is required to construct, equip new schools, and expand existing schools to absorb this increase in the number of students.

- 2) **Health:** The increased number of Iraqi patients that are benefiting from the public healthcare system (primary health care centers and public hospitals) is placing further pressures on the already crowded public health providers mainly in the cities of Amman, Zarqa, and Irbid. It is estimated that an amount of US\$176 million is required to meet this additional demand.
- 3) **Water and Sanitation:** Jordan is one of the ten most water-deprived countries in the world, with the average Jordanian's share of fresh water at less than 140 cubic meters per year, compared to world average of 4000 cubic meters. Moreover, and due to additional demand the water sector is yet under further pressures. The estimated additional cost required to address the rising demand on the water sector is around US\$430 million. This amount will be utilized to fund priority projects to provide additional drinking water, construct new wastewater treatment plants, and rehabilitate the water and wastewater networks in these cities.
- 4) **Energy:** While Jordan imports 97 percent of its energy supply, the influx of Iraqis to Jordan has resulted in an increasing demand on the energy sector in Jordan. Imports of fuel have increased from 6 million tons of oil equivalent in 2004 to over 7.5 million tons of oil equivalent in 2007. There has been also a similar increase in the demand on electricity. It is estimated that Iraqis living in Jordan are annually consuming around 900 GW of electricity, which accounts for 8 percent of Jordan's total electricity consumption. In order to meet this increase in demand on energy, Jordan needs to invest around US\$300 million to expand the capacity of electricity generation facilities and the capacity of the Jordanian oil refinery.
- 5) **Transport:** The hosting of hundreds of thousand of Iraqis has resulted in heavy traffic, pollution, and increased usage of roads, placing additional pressures on all transportation means across the country, and accordingly on the quality of road networks. If poor road conditions continue to worsen as a result of the increased traffic, Jordan's attractiveness as both a tourist and investment destination will be also affected. For this purpose, the Government is channeling additional investments of US\$179 million for roads construction and maintenance to reduce the traffic and provide additional means of public transportation.
- 6) **National Security:** The unstable security situation in Iraq has expanded the potential of terror attacks in Jordan, and is furthermore necessitating additional security measures to maintain Jordan's attractiveness as a safe destination for investment and tourism purposes in the Middle East. These additional security challenges increase Jordan's security expenditures by over US\$312 million.

Excellencies,

Despite the magnitude of challenges facing Jordan as a result of the influx of Iraqis, the Government of Jordan is committed to continue to do all it can do to ease the hardship on Iraqis residing in Jordan. However, Jordan continues to count on the support of the International Community in order to maintain the current quality of services that are being offered to Iraqis, while addressing the challenges related to strained social services, aggravated economic pressures, and magnified internal security concerns.