

PHOTO FEATURE: Mosul under siege – 100 days on, and the UN's humanitarian response

24 January 2017 – Armed conflict in Iraq has caused the displacement of more than three million people since June 2014 – one million of those displaced may be as a direct result of the Iraqi military's efforts to liberate Mosul and surrounding areas from the control of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da'esh), according to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees.

One hundred days into the Iraqi military operation, people continue to be exposed to violence, human rights violations, restricted access to safety and freedom of movement, abduction and illegal detention, limited access to basic services. As well, many lack of the documentation necessary to enjoy their basic rights.

Before and after the start of the military operation, United Nations agencies rallied efforts to assist civilians with a range of targeted services, from distributing much-needed relief supplies, such as food and health care, to providing shelter and other humanitarian assistance.

Since 17 October 2016, when the Iraqi military operation to retake Mosul began, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) has tracked the movements of more than 26,873 displaced families – 161,238 individuals – the majority of whom desperately need life-saving humanitarian assistance.

Emergency supplies are desperately needed. The UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) is providing food, water and hygiene items to displaced families – these supplies include water purification tablets, high energy biscuits, jerry cans, baby hygiene kits and leaflets with information on child protection and basic mine awareness.

Knowing what is needed and when is crucial for helping those most in need in a timely fashion. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) is monitoring the situation on the ground, and providing updates on funding and the humanitarian response – including gaps and constraints on camp coordination and management; shelter and non-food items; food security; health; water, sanitation and hygiene; education; logistics; and emergency telecommunications.

Providing those in need with the right sustenance to survive falls under the responsibility of the World Food Programme (WFP), which has been providing monthly food rations and ready-to-eat food to the affected people. These food rations contain items such as rice, lentils, wheat flour, bulgur wheat, beans and vegetable oil.

The need for impartial respect and protection of human rights is crucial in

Iraq to ensure that, among other things, women and children are protected from sexual and gender-based violence and diverse ethnic and religious minorities and persons with disabilities are granted access to basic services without discrimination. The UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) has a human rights unit that works with the authorities and members of Iraqi civil society to support this requirement. The Mission's work includes tracking civilian deaths and injuries to tally casualty figures on a monthly basis. Shown here, the head of UNAMI's Human Rights Office, Francesco Motta, sits in a camp for displaced persons, hearing from a man whose children were abducted by ISIL (Da'esh).

Whether women live or die in a crisis often depends on their access to basic sexual and reproductive health services – often taking a back seat to other urgent needs, like food and shelter. The UN Population Fund (UNFPA) has been working with Iraq's Ministry of Health and civil society organizations to deliver these vital services to vulnerable populations. UNFPA has also been working hard in Mosul to provide immediate relief to women and girls affected by the conflict – including through the distribution of dignity kits, which contain hygiene supplies such as toothbrushes, toothpaste, shampoo, soap, sanitary pads and underclothes.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has been on the ground in Iraq since 1960. Through its various programmes, the UN health agency is currently work on revitalizing, strengthening and sustaining the Iraqi health system based on primary health care. For Mosul, in addition to delivering medicines and supplies to treat injuries and chronic conditions, WHO has conducted trauma management training for medical doctors in Erbil, Ninewa and Dohuk, and for paramedical teams engaged in managing civilian casualties from Mosul.

The fighting in Iraq has caused a massive displacement of people seeking safety – with some 3.1 million displaced inside Iraq, while another 220,000 are refugees in other countries. From Mosul, where, in early December 2016, the number of displaced people approached 100,000, UNHCR stepped up the distribution of winter material – providing thermal blankets and quilts to 11,200 people around Mosul.