

Thursday 12 February 2015

P8_TA(2015)0040

Humanitarian crisis in Iraq and Syria, in particular in the IS context**European Parliament resolution of 12 February 2015 on the humanitarian crisis in Iraq and Syria, in particular in the IS context (2015/2559(RSP))**

(2016/C 310/09)

The European Parliament,

- having regard to its previous resolutions on Iraq and Syria,
- having regard to the Foreign Affairs Council conclusions on Iraq and Syria, in particular those of 15 December 2014,
- having regard to the Council conclusions on Iraq and Syria of 30 August 2014,
- having regard to the statements by the Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (VP/HR) on Iraq and Syria,
- having regard to the Joint Communication of 6 February 2015 by the VP/HR and the Commission entitled 'Elements for an EU regional strategy for Syria and Iraq as well as the Da'esh threat',
- having regard to UN Security Council Resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014) and 2170 (2014) and UN Human Rights Council resolution S-22/1,
- having regard to the UN Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic entitled 'Rule of Terror: Living under ISIS in Syria', of 14 November 2014,
- having regard to the Concluding observations on the combined second to fourth periodic reports of Iraq, published by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child on 4 February 2015,
- having regard to the statements by the Secretary-General of the UN on Iraq and Syria,
- having regard to the recent statements by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, António Guterres, on the situation of Syrian and Iraqi refugees,
- having regard to the NATO Summit Declaration of 5 September 2014,
- having regard to the EU Guidelines on international humanitarian law, on human rights defenders, and on the promotion and protection of freedom of religion or belief,
- having regard to the conclusions of the International Conference on Peace and Security in Iraq, held in Paris on 15 September 2014,
- having regard to the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) between the European Union and its Member States, of the one part, and the Republic of Iraq, of the other, and to its position of 17 January 2013 on that agreement ⁽¹⁾,
- having regard to Rule 123(2) and (4) of its Rules of Procedure,

⁽¹⁾ Texts adopted, P7_TA(2013)0023.

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- A. whereas the ongoing violent crisis in Syria as a result of the Assad regime and terrorist violence has resulted in a humanitarian catastrophe of an unprecedented scale in history, with more than 200 000 people killed, most of them civilians, more than 7,6 million people internally displaced, and more than 12,2 million Syrians in desperate need of assistance inside Syria; whereas 211 500 people are still besieged — 185 000 by government forces and 26 500 by opposition forces; whereas more than 3,8 million Syrians have fled their country, mainly to Lebanon (1 160 468 refugees), Turkey (1 623 839), Jordan (621 773) and Egypt/North Africa (160 772);
- B. whereas the humanitarian situation in Iraq caused by the ongoing conflict and the violence and repression by the terrorist organisation ISIL/Daesh continues to deteriorate, and whereas more than 5,2 million people are in need of urgent humanitarian assistance and more than 2,1 million Iraqis are internally displaced; whereas there are 3,6 million people living in areas controlled by ISIL/Daesh, 2,2 million of whom are in urgent need of aid, and whereas these people are particularly difficult to access; whereas Iraq is also hosting more than 233 000 Syrian refugees;
- C. whereas many refugees and internally displaced people are not registered, which disenfranchises unregistered populations from much-needed humanitarian aid and basic protection measures;
- D. whereas the terrorist organisation ISIL/Daesh has conquered parts of north-western Iraq using brutal and indiscriminate violence, including Iraq's second-largest city, Mosul, and whereas this was followed by summary executions of Iraqi citizens, the imposition of a harsh interpretation of sharia law, the destruction of Shiite, Sufi, Sunni, Yazidi, Kurdish and Christian places of worship and shrines, and barbaric atrocities against the civilian population, which have had a particular impact on women and children;
- E. whereas former Ba'athist military personnel of the Iraqi army have joined ISIL/Daesh, and whereas the army itself is plagued by rampant corruption and political interference, which are hampering an effective response to ISIL/Daesh on its part;
- F. whereas ISIL/Daesh has established so-called 'sharia courts' in the territory under its control, which have been carrying out barbaric, cruel and inhuman punishments against men, women and children; whereas ISIL/Daesh has published a penal code listing crimes punishable by amputation, stoning and crucifixion; whereas those who are punished are accused of violating the group's extremist interpretations of Islamic sharia law, or of suspected disloyalty;
- G. whereas ISIL/Daesh has launched systematic campaigns of ethnic cleansing in northern Iraq and Syria, carrying out war crimes and gross violations of international humanitarian law, including mass summary killings and abductions, against ethnic and religious minorities; whereas the UN has already reported on targeted killings, forced conversions, abductions, the rape, smuggling and kidnapping of women, the slavery of women and children, the recruitment of children for suicide bombings, and sexual and physical abuse and torture; whereas ethnic and religious minorities, including Christian, Kurdish, Yazidi, Turkmen, Shabak, Kaka'i, Sabeen and Shia communities, as well as many Arabs and Sunni Muslims, have been targeted by ISIL/Daesh;
- H. whereas a report released by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child on 4 February 2015 claims that ISIL/Daesh militants are selling abducted children as sex slaves and killing others, including by means of crucifixion and burying alive; whereas most child refugees and displaced children do not have access to education;
- I. whereas large numbers of women have been killed or abducted by ISIL/Daesh in Syria and Iraq; whereas those abducted women and girls have reportedly been subjected to rape or sexual abuse, forced to marry fighters, or sold into sexual slavery; whereas some women have been sold as slaves for as little as USD 25; whereas Yazidi women in Iraq are particularly targeted; whereas integrated sexual and reproductive health/sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) services are clearly lacking;

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- J. whereas educated, professional women, and particularly women having run as candidates in elections for public office, seem to be at risk; whereas reports indicate that at least three women lawyers have been executed and four doctors recently killed in central Mosul; whereas the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) is expected to present a report documenting human rights violations by ISIL/Daesh in Iraq to the Human Rights Council in March 2015; whereas apostates have been targeted and subjected to inhumane violence;
- K. whereas LGBT people are suffering from violence and murders carried out by ISIL/Daesh, which have been taking place with total impunity; whereas the situation of LGBT people in the region is particularly vulnerable, given the limited family and community support and government protection, and whereas their safety remains at risk in refugee communities or in certain host societies;
- L. whereas much-needed specific psychological help for victims of the conflict, including rape victims, is not available;
- M. whereas the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) has stated that almost 50 % of all Syrians have lost their homes and 40 % of the refugees are forced to endure sub-standard living conditions; whereas, according to the UN, three out of four Syrians live in poverty and the unemployment rate is over 50 %; whereas, in spite of strong efforts by the governments concerned, two thirds of the Syrian refugees in Jordan are living below the poverty line and 55 % of the refugees in Lebanon live in sub-standard shelters; whereas violence and discrimination against refugees have risen in the host countries;
- N. whereas a severe winter is sweeping across the Middle East and the UNHCR has stepped up its winter assistance, launching a USD 206 million winter plan to help millions of vulnerable people in the region; whereas, despite the efforts made, many refugees are forced to live in unfinished buildings and inadequate shelters that expose them to sub-zero temperatures, heavy snow and strong winds; whereas approximately 740 000 internally displaced Iraqis are sheltering in sub-standard housing, and the UNHCR is taking steps to provide 600 000 of the displaced persons with winter support in Iraq;
- O. whereas when temperatures rise, the risk of epidemics associated with dire sanitation conditions and limited access to safe drinking water, particularly in communal and informal settlements, increases;
- P. whereas UNICEF is delivering winter assistance in Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey to 916 000 of the 1,3 million children targeted; whereas UNICEF and the World Food Programme (WFP) launched a winter cash assistance campaign in January 2015 to provide 41 000 vulnerable refugee children in the Za'atari and Azraq camps with 14 Jordanian dinars to allow their family to buy them winter clothes;
- Q. whereas on 1 December 2014 the WFP was temporarily forced to suspend a critical food aid scheme for more than 1,7 million Syrian refugees because of an international funding crisis; whereas the WFP raised USD 88 million after an urgent appeal and could provide food assistance to the refugees in Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt and Turkey; whereas the WFP estimates that 2,8 million people in Iraq currently need food assistance; whereas the WFP alone required USD 214,5 million as a matter of urgency for its operations in Syria and the region, of which USD 112,6 million was needed to meet food assistance needs for the next four months;
- R. whereas the parties to the conflict have used collective punishment as a weapon of war and have stolen and illicitly traded aid products, thereby violating the Geneva Conventions;
- S. whereas, according to the Commission, approximately 276 000 refugees have tried to enter the EU illegally, the majority of whom undertook the dangerous journey across the Mediterranean; whereas, according to international organisations, nearly 2 % of the refugees drowned during the journey; whereas criminal organisations are transporting refugees in 'ghost boats' hurtling on autopilot towards the EU; whereas on 9 December 2014 a Resettlement Conference was held in Geneva, at which governments pledged to take in 100 000 Syrian refugees; whereas according to the UNHCR the contributions will still be insufficient with regard to the resettlement needs in the region;

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- T. whereas more than EUR 3,3 billion has been mobilised by the EU and its Member States for relief and recovery assistance to Syrians in their country and to the refugees and their host countries; whereas in 2014 alone the EU and its Member States were the second-largest humanitarian donor to Iraq, providing EUR 163 million; whereas the European Union Civil Protection Mechanism was activated at the request of the Iraqi Government; whereas the EU has spent more than it envisaged to address humanitarian needs, and whereas funds pledged by several non-EU countries have not always actually been transferred;
- U. whereas, despite the various appeals, the international community is failing to meet the needs of Syrians and Iraqis and of the countries harbouring refugees; whereas, according to Kyung-wha Kang, UN Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, UN operations are suffering from a lack of funding, with just 39 % of the required USD 2,3 billion having been received; whereas the UNHCR has stated that the delivery of relief aid continues to be a critical priority, but that it remains very difficult to operate within the areas to provide civilians and refugees with the proper aid they need; whereas UN agencies operating humanitarian programmes are to ensure a more integrated and cost-efficient response to the needs of all populations of concern;
- V. whereas the international community is to provide a proportional response to military efforts, aimed at mitigating the suffering of civilians trapped by the conflict; whereas justice and reconciliation will be needed as an element of post-conflict measures and as a step towards building inclusive, representative and democratic governance;
- W. whereas some Member States are offering equipment and training assistance to the legitimate Iraqi force and the Kurdish Peshmergas; whereas some Member States are directly participating in the military actions of the coalition against ISIL/Daesh;
1. Strongly condemns the gruesome, systematic and widespread human rights abuses and violations committed by the Assad regime, the terrorists of ISIL/Daesh and other jihadi groups in Iraq and Syria, including the killing of hostages, all forms of violence against people on the basis of their religious or ethnic affiliation, and violence against women and LGBTI people; stresses once again that the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion is a fundamental human right; deplores the establishment of unlawful so-called 'sharia courts' in the territory under ISIL/Daesh control; recalls its absolute condemnation of torture; expresses its deep sympathy to the victims of the atrocities committed by the Assad regime, the terrorists of ISIL/Daesh and other jihadi groups, and calls for the immediate release of all hostages; strongly condemns ISIL/Daesh abuses against children;
 2. Expresses growing concern about the deteriorating humanitarian and human rights situation in Syria and Iraq and the violations of international humanitarian law, not least in the context of the ISIL/Daesh insurgency;
 3. Stresses that the ongoing war in Syria and the recent threat posed by ISIL/Daesh constitute a serious danger to the people of Iraq and Syria, and to the broader Middle East; calls for the EU to adopt and implement a comprehensive regional strategy for defeating ISIL/Daesh and to contribute to joint efforts to mitigate the humanitarian crisis and end the conflict in Syria and Iraq; recalls that a cohesive response is needed in order to coordinate all aspects of engagement and to support host countries, including with security, humanitarian, development and macro-economic assistance; commends the role of neighbouring countries in accepting refugees; emphasises that the EU needs a strategy that complements UN and counter-ISIL/Daesh coalition activities and is aimed at engaging with regional partners in order to address terrorism financing, the supply of weapons and the flow of transnational foreign fighters;
 4. Emphasises that various ethnic and religious minority groups have lived in peace for decades in the Middle East;
 5. Supports the global campaign against ISIL/Daesh, and welcomes the commitment of the coalition partners to working together under a common, multifaceted and long-term strategy to defeat ISIL/Daesh; supports the King of Jordan's strong determination to fight ISIL/Daesh; welcomes the defeat of ISIL/Daesh in the Syrian town of Kobani; stresses that assistance to enable the countries of the region to fight violent extremism, together with instruments to counter terrorism financing, should be part of this strategy; emphasises, in this connection, that any military campaign to liberate the territories under ISIL/Daesh control should adhere strictly to international humanitarian law and international human rights law, so as to avoid causing more loss of lives and feeding the extremist agenda, and to prevent new waves of refugees and internally displaced persons;

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6. Condemns the use and exploitation of oilfields and related infrastructure by ISIL/Daesh and associated groups, which enables ISIL/Daesh to generate substantial income, and urges all states to uphold UN Security Council Resolutions 2161 (2014) and 2170 (2014), which condemn all trade, direct or indirect, with ISIL/Daesh and associated groups;
7. Stresses the centrality of protection of civilians within its comprehensive regional strategy, and the need to keep separate humanitarian and military/counter-terrorism efforts; emphasises the interlinkage between conflict and humanitarian suffering and radicalisation;
8. Takes the view that defeating the extremist terrorist threat that is gaining ground across the Middle East and North Africa region and beyond is crucial to combating terrorism inside the EU, since its advance actually feeds home-grown radicalisation;
9. Reiterates its concern at the fact that thousands of transnational foreign fighters, including citizens of the Member States, have joined the ISIL/Daesh insurgency; calls on the Member States to take appropriate measures to prevent fighters from travelling from their soil, in line with UN Security Council Resolution 2170 (2014), and to develop a common strategy for security services and EU agencies with regard to monitoring and controlling jihadists; calls for cooperation in the EU and at international level with a view to appropriate legal action against any individual suspected of being involved in acts of terrorism; calls on the Member States to intensify cooperation and the exchange of information among themselves and with EU bodies;
10. Welcomes the EU's new strategy 'Elements for an EU regional strategy for Syria and Iraq as well as the Daesh threat', notably its EUR 1 billion package to 'help restore peace and security that have been devastated by terrorism and violence for too long' according to the VP/HR;
11. Calls on the international community to provide more humanitarian aid and assistance to the people affected by the crisis in Iraq and Syria; calls for the EU to consider initiating the convening of a donor conference; welcomes the commitments made by Member States of the EU, as the biggest donor of financial aid, and their pledges for the future; calls for the EU to put pressure on all donors to fulfil their promises and to deliver on their pledges swiftly; calls for an increase in the EU's contributions to the UN's humanitarian programmes and for the EU to strengthen its cooperation with international organisations;
12. Stresses that, in view of the unprecedented scale of the crisis, alleviating the suffering of millions of Syrians and Iraqis in need of basic goods and services must be a priority for the EU and the international community at large; condemns the consistent thwarting of attempts to deliver humanitarian aid and calls on all parties involved in the conflict to respect universal human rights, to facilitate the provision of humanitarian aid and assistance through all possible channels, including across borders and conflict lines, and to ensure the safety of all medical personnel and humanitarian workers, in line with the various UN Security Council resolutions on the subject;
13. Calls on all the parties to the conflict to comply with international humanitarian law and to ensure that civilians are protected, have unhindered access to medical facilities and humanitarian assistance, and are able to leave areas affected by violence safely and with dignity;
14. Is convinced that immediate humanitarian assistance and protection need to be an integral part of long-term strategies to mitigate the human suffering caused by the conflict and to support the socio-economic rights and livelihood opportunities of returnees, internally displaced persons and refugees, including women, so as to ensure enhanced leadership and participation, with a view to empowering them to choose durable solutions that suit their needs; considers that there is a need to address the specific risks faced by and the particular needs of different groups of women and children who are subjected to multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination;

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15. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to adopt immediately specific actions to address the situation of women and girls in Iraq and Syria and to guarantee their freedom and respect for their most fundamental rights, and to adopt measures to prevent exploitation, abuse and violence against women and children, in particular the forced marriage of girls; is particularly concerned about the increase in all forms of violence against women, who are being imprisoned, raped, sexually abused and sold by members of ISIL/Daesh;
16. Urges a renewed focus on access to education, tailored to the specific needs generated by the ongoing conflict;
17. Calls for the EU and its Member States to make full use of the EU Guidelines to promote and protect the enjoyment of all human rights by lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) persons, in relation to Iraq and Syria;
18. Calls on the international humanitarian agencies working in Iraq and Syria, including UN agencies, to increase the provision of medical and counselling services, including psychological treatment and support, for displaced people who have fled the ISIL/Daesh advances, paying special attention to the needs of the most vulnerable populations, i.e. survivors of sexual violence and children; calls for financial assistance to be made available, and for the creation of programmes to comprehensively address the medical/psychological and social needs of SGBV survivors in the ongoing conflict;
19. Calls on all the Member States to expedite the processing of asylum applications from the increasing number of refugees fleeing the conflict zones; calls for the EU to address the issue of the often fatal journeys across the Mediterranean, to implement a coordinated strategy aimed at saving lives, and to provide support to the Member States most affected by the mass arrival of irregular migrants and asylum seekers on their shores;
20. Reiterates its condemnation, in the harshest terms, of the crimes perpetrated by the Syrian regime against its population, including the use of chemical and incendiary weapons against civilians, mass arbitrary detention and its siege strategy to starve the population into submission;
21. Points out that the inadequate response to the instability in Syria has allowed ISIL/Daesh to flourish; expresses its concern at the increasing involvement of extremist Islamist groups and transnational foreign fighters in the conflict in Syria; stresses that a lasting solution requires a political transition through a Syrian-led, inclusive political process based on the Geneva communiqué of June 2012, with the support of the international community; calls for the EU to take the initiative for diplomatic efforts to that end; welcomes and supports the work of UN Special Envoy for Syria Staffan de Mistura, and his efforts to achieve a freeze on heavy fighting in urban centres, including Aleppo;
22. Calls on all regional actors to contribute to the de-escalation efforts in Iraq and Syria;
23. Calls on the new Iraqi leadership to act on its commitment to an inclusive government — one that represents the legitimate interests and addresses the dire humanitarian needs of all Iraqis; calls on the Iraqi authorities and the international community to prevent the taking of revenge against the Sunni civilian population of the areas currently under the control of ISIL/Daesh after these areas are liberated from ISIL/Daesh; underlines the fact that Iraq's unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity are essential for stability and economic development in the country and the region;
24. Welcomes the efforts of the Commission's Humanitarian and Civil Protection department (ECHO) office in Erbil, the capital of the Kurdistan Region in Iraq, to address the humanitarian situation in the region; stresses that more and better coordination is needed between ECHO and the Commission's Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development (DEVCO), in order to serve the populations in need in the best possible and most effective way;

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25. Welcomes the announcement by VP/HR Federica Mogherini concerning the opening of the EU office in Erbil, and calls for the opening of this office to improve the effectiveness and visibility of EU action on the ground, including better coordination of humanitarian and development assistance; calls for the reinforcement of the EU office in Gaziantep, Turkey;
26. Supports the UN Human Rights Council's request to the OHCHR for a mission to be dispatched to Iraq as a matter of urgency to investigate violations and abuses of international human rights law committed by ISIL/Daesh and associated terrorist groups, and to establish the facts and circumstances of such abuses and violations, with a view to preventing impunity and ensuring full accountability;
27. Remains convinced that there can be no sustainable peace in Syria and Iraq without accountability for the crimes committed by all sides during the conflict, in particular those based on religious or ethnic grounds; reiterates its call for the referral of those suspected of committing crimes against humanity in Syria and Iraq to the International Criminal Court, and supports all initiatives in this direction, for instance through the UN Security Council;
28. Requests equal accountability measures for all parties to the conflict, and access to legal support for all victims of the ubiquitous violations; takes the view that it is of paramount importance to ensure the protection of civilians who are trapped by violence and unable to access places of safety or who cannot access life-saving humanitarian assistance;
29. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the Council, the Commission, the EU Special Representative for Human Rights, the governments and parliaments of the Member States, the Government and Council of Representatives of Iraq, the Regional Government of Kurdistan, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, the United Nations Human Rights Council and all the parties involved in the conflict in Syria.
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