

## Brazil Offers a House to Palestinian Refugees from Iraq

Contributed by Newsroom  
Wednesday, 04 July 2007

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) welcomed an offer by Brazil to resettle an estimated 100 Palestinians formerly living in Iraq starting in mid-September. Apart from Canada and New Zealand, in recent years Brazil has been the only country to offer resettlement to Palestinian refugees from Iraq, according to UNHCR.

The agency is "grateful for a generous offer by the Government of Brazil" to help roughly 22 Palestinian families settle in southeastern state of São Paulo and 18 families in Rio Grande do Sul, a state in the south of the country, spokesperson Jennifer Pagonis told a press briefing in Geneva.

Since 2003, most of the Palestinian refugees have been living 60 kilometers (37 miles) from the Iraq border in Ruwayshed, Jordan. "There, they have faced extremely harsh conditions in a dusty and scorpion-infested desert camp with nowhere to go," Ms. Pagonis said.

More than 1,450 Palestinians from Iraq remain stranded along the Iraq-Syria border in "deplorable conditions," with another estimated 13,000 Palestinians affected by violence and harassment in Iraq, she noted.

As part of the resettlement, Brazil is also focusing on successfully integrating the Palestinians into Brazilian society. Prior to departing, each group of roughly 30 people will be extensively briefed, culturally sensitized and given Portuguese languages lessons by Brazilian UNCHR staff presently working in Jordan that will continue for up to 12 months upon arrival in Brazil.

Bilingual (Arabic-Portuguese) UNHCR staff in Brazil will be trained in Palestinian cultures and traditions to facilitate the process.

All of the refugees will receive accommodations, furniture and material assistance for up to 24 months, with unaccompanied elderly refugees being settled in homes where medical treatment will be provided, according to UNHCR.

Last week, the agency appealed for the medical evacuation of at least 12 Palestinians - mostly young children - with serious medical problems from the Iraqi-Syria border and from Baghdad.

Now, Ms. Pagonis reports that two European countries have provided "positive indications" in response, and voiced hope "that they will speed up their decision in order to save their lives before it is too late.