

# Red Cross: Iraq humanitarian situation one of the most desperate

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Geneva - The humanitarian situation in Iraq five years after the US-led invasion is 'one of the most critical in the world,' the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) said in a report issued Monday.

'Better security in some parts of Iraq must not distract attention from the continuing plight of millions of people who have essentially been left to their own devices,' said Beatrice Megevand Roggo, the ICRC's head of operations for the Middle East and North Africa.

'Among them are displaced and refugee families, and those who have returned to their homes, children, elderly people, disabled people, households headed by women and families of detainees,' she said.

According to the report, millions of Iraqis have insufficient access to clean water, sanitation and health care because of the conflict. The current crisis is exacerbated by the lasting effects of previous armed conflicts and years of sanctions.

The ICRC also reported desperate conditions among health care provision. It said that currently there were 30,000 beds at the approximately 65 private and 172 public hospitals, but a further 80,000 were needed. The hospital buildings themselves are often in a poor condition.

Since 2003 more than 2,200 doctors and nurses have been killed and more than 250 kidnapped, the report said. Of the 34,000 doctors registered in 1990 at least 20,000 have left the country.

In addition, the water supply has continued to deteriorate over the past year. Millions of people have been forced to rely on insufficient supplies of poor-quality water as water and sewage systems suffer from a lack of maintenance and a shortage of engineers.

'To avert an even worse crisis, more attention must be paid to the everyday needs of Iraqis,' said Megevand Roggo. 'Everyone should have regular access to health care, electricity, clean water and sanitation.'