

Looming Mosul catastrophe: Red Cross ready to provide for 300,000 out of 1mn refugees

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The International Committee of the Red Cross expects up to 1 million to join the number of internally-displaced people in Iraq due to the ongoing siege of Mosul, but is prepared to provide only 300,000 of them, a representative told RT.

*"We at the International Red Cross have offices in the north. Our teams are there, and we will be ready to provide emergency relief – food, hygiene kits, cutlery, stoves, blankets, anything these people are going to need. Today we can provide up to 300,000. We are increasing our stocks because we expect it to be huge,"* told RT Sarah Alzawqari, ICRC spokesperson for Iraq.

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There are currently 3 million internally-displaced people in Iraq. The ICRC is concerned that the number may increase by a third, as people flee Mosul, the Iraqi stronghold of Islamic State (IS, formerly ISIS/ISIL).

A force of Iraqi army troops, Kurdish militias and up to 1,500 Turkey-trained fighters are reportedly taking part in a major offensive on the city, which was announced earlier on Sunday. The US-led coalition is to provide aerial support for the operation.

*“From what we can see we are really concerned about a really big humanitarian catastrophe that is going to happen, once the operation starts and people start fleeing Mosul. We expect hundreds of thousands of families, people that can reach up to one million newly displaced in Iraq in addition to the three million that there is,”* Alzawqari said.

Mosul has been under IS control since its lightning offensive two years ago overwhelmed the US-trained Iraqi Army and seized a lot of American military hardware and financial assets in Iraq. Re-taking Mosul would be a major turning point for Baghdad.

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The operation launch followed the reported move by the US and Saudi Arabia to allow free passage to thousands of IS fighters who were allowed to leave Mosul and go to Syria, where they are expected to fight against the Syrian government.

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