

Beat: News

Half a million Iraqis flee after Islamists seize Mosul

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USPA News - An estimated 500,000 people have fled their homes in Mosul since militants from an al-Qaeda splinter group seized control of the northern Iraqi city earlier this week, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) reported on Wednesday. Mosul, the second largest city in Iraq with a population of 2 million, is located within northern Ninewa governorate.

Heavy fighting between Iraqi security forces and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) erupted on Saturday, leading to ISIL's take-over of Mosul on Tuesday. Much of Iraq's security forces were forced to abandon Mosul on Monday and Tuesday, allowing ISIL militants to quickly take control of Mosul International Airport and seize police and military bases as well as government buildings. It follows the take-over of Fallujah in January. Since the take-over of Mosul this week, internally displaced persons (IDPs) have moved from the west bank to the east bank of the city. Other IDPs are making their way to other parts of Ninewa governorate, which is also largely under ISIL control, while others are moving from the city to the autonomous Kurdistan Region. IOM, citing sources in the city, said that there has been a high number of casualties among civilians since the fighting began, but exact figures are not available. Mosques have been used as clinics to treat the wounded because hospitals cannot be accessed due to violence in the area where they are situated, the organization said. Iraq's Ministry of Migration and Displacement and civil society organizations have provided those displaced by the violence with basic non-food relief items. The western part of Mosul is lacking drinking water due to the main water source being bombed. Families are running low on food as well, especially people who are hosting IDPs. Most areas of Mosul are also without electricity, but if they are able to receive electricity it is only for one to two hours a day, according to IOM. Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki on Tuesday asked parliament to declare a state of emergency as militants have continued to make gains throughout the country, with militants also seizing parts of Tikrit on Wednesday. The United States has said that the situation represents a threat to the region as a whole, which includes Syria where a civil war continues. The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS), an offshoot of al-Qaeda, now controls a substantial amount of territory in both eastern Syria as well as western and central Iraq. This year, the Iraq's Anbar governorate, which includes Fallujah, has seen violence which has taken the lives of an estimated 5,520 civilians and has displaced an estimated 70,000 families throughout the country. In six months, the fighting has spread immensely, causing concern about the government's ability to maintain control.

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