

ITEM B.114
ACTION ITEM FOR GAC BUSINESS

<i>FOR GAC EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S OFFICE USE ONLY</i>					
	A. Evangelism		D. Vocation		G. PC (USA), A Corporation
X	B. Justice		E. Stewardship		H. Executive Committee
	C. Discipleship		F. Audit		I. Personnel Committee
	P. Plenary				

Subject:

Comment to Overture 025 to 218th GA (2008)

Recommendation:

The GAC approve the following comment to the 218th General Assembly on Overture 025:

The General Assembly Council affirms the Christian concern demonstrated by the Presbytery of Lake Huron for Iraqis who have fled their home country. The GAC commends the Presbytery of Lake Huron for bringing this issue before the General Assembly.

Groups working on refugee issues report that over 1 million displaced Iraqis are living in Jordan, and 1.5 million in Syria. The vast and still-growing numbers of Iraqis fleeing their home country with no permanent place to go has laid a growing burden on the governments, societies, and churches of neighboring countries in the region. For example, providing education for displaced Iraqi children poses a significant challenge.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), through the Office on the Middle East, the Iraq Partnership Network, and other programs, continues to lift up the plight of Iraqi refugees and displaced persons. Through the Peace Fund for Solidarity with the Churches of Iraq (Extra Commitment Opportunity account #E051722) and the Jinishian Memorial Program, the PC(USA) has also assisted the churches of the region, through the Middle East Council of Churches, as they address this crisis.

The GAC supports the call to the United States government to alleviate the suffering of Iraqi refugees. Part of that effort could involve working with other nations, particularly Iraq, and supporting the work of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and other agencies.

Overture 025

Regarding Assistance for Iraqi Refugees—From the Presbytery of Lake Huron.

The Presbytery of Lake Huron respectfully overtures the 218th General Assembly (2008) to do the following:

- **recognize, support, and applaud the efforts of all United States government employees now assisting Iraqi refugees and displaced persons to the extent possible in Iraq and neighboring countries;**
- **strongly advocate the United States government to act more quickly to provide haven in the United States for threatened Iraqi refugees and displaced persons regardless of their religious faith, after screening for public health and security risks;**
- **strongly advocate the United States government to provide adequate staff, resources, and simplified procedures to rapidly implement an improved Iraqi refugee resettlement program;**
- **encourage churches and presbyteries to welcome Iraqi refugees within their region, sponsoring and assisting in their resettlement; and**
- **direct the Washington office of PC (USA) to advocate for legislation supporting resettlement of Iraqi refugees in the United States.**

Rationale

Christians are called to have compassion and to aid the injured, the lost, and the dispossessed. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has a long history of policies and actions to aid refugees in stressed regions. Our nation has grown over the centuries from the influx of refugees from many nations. Since 1940, the United States has provided special refugee status to many thousands of refugees from military conflicts in which the United States participated.

The continuing conflict in Iraq has resulted in millions of refugees and internally displaced persons, yet very few Iraqis have been granted requested refugee status and resettlement in the United States. Attempts by the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to aid the resettlement of Iraqi refugees, including Iraqi church leaders, have revealed this refugee crisis:

- Very few visas to enter the United States have been authorized or issued for Iraqi refugees
- Processing of refugees is extremely slow, apparently due to complex procedures and inadequate personnel resources
- Most Iraqi refugees and internally displaced persons, now in the millions, are in appalling, desperate situations in Iraq and the neighboring countries.

We believe that the church must urge our government to address these humanitarian concerns by taking the actions recommended in this overture and that the church itself must respond to the crisis by encouraging congregations to participate in resettlement efforts.