

IRAQ

SITUATION REPORT



UNITED NATIONS

26 April – 2 May 2004

UNITED NATIONS ASSISTANCE MISSION FOR IRAQ

OVERVIEW ►

As insecurity worsens in Iraq the United Nations (UN) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are facing increasing obstacles in delivering humanitarian assistance to those in critical need, notably in southern Iraq. In a week marred by continued violence and the disclosure of reprehensible acts by armed combatants, seemingly in direct violation of international human rights law, a path toward peace has been proposed by the United Nations. If embraced by Iraqis, this opportunity can lead to the conducting of free and fair elections, and a fully representative democratically elected government, in January 2005.

HUMANITARIAN ►

Education and Culture (Cluster 1) The UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) has rehabilitated 220 schools nationwide since April 2003. The UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) recently organised a regional symposium on curriculum development in cooperation with the Iraqi Ministry of Education (MoE). The UN Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT) is currently implementing school rehabilitation and community projects focused in the Lower South. UN-HABITAT's programme is targeting primary and secondary schools in Samawa, Basra, Nasayiriah and Amarah. Pending security constraints, follow up activities will include schools, housing and community rehabilitation in Baghdad and technical higher education facilities in Baghdad, Basra and Samawa.

Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons - IDPs (Cluster 8) In cooperation with NGOs Première Urgence, Islamic Relief and Intersos, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has over recent weeks distributed more than 6,500 blankets, over 1,100 cooking stoves, 3,000 mattresses, 1,000 plastic tarpaulins, 1,000 female hygiene kits, and 375 jerry cans to displaced people. In the south of the country, UNHCR staff are not reporting any major population displacement despite tension around cities like Najaf. The International Organisation for Migration (IOM), after conducting an inter-agency assessment mission of the southern marshlands, is planning 26 new projects supporting the rehabilitation of hospitals, clinics, schools and agriculture in Basra, Missan and Thi'Qar. IOM activities to date have assisted some 5,000 individuals throughout the governorates of Al Anbar and Baghdad. As IDP and non-food items (NFI) Interagency focal point, IOM continues to coordinate response mechanisms to emergencies.

Despite the difficult situation, the UNHCR is still assisting non-Iraqi refugees in Iraq (Palestinians, Syrians, Iranians and Turkish refugees) through partners like Qandil, Islamic Relief, Intersos and in full cooperation with the Iraqi Ministry of Displacement and Migration. UNHCR is very worried about the effect of the deteriorating security situation on the country's refugee population. In northern Iraq, evictions of displaced persons, recent returnees and other vulnerable groups have also been reported, and people living in several public buildings in Mosul and Kirkuk have been threatened with eviction. UNHCR is also continuing to provide reintegration support, including housing, water, sanitation, education and health assistance for returning IDP families and the local communities in more than 26 northern villages. UN-HABITAT is providing technical support to UNHCR to rehabilitate 200 houses in the Lower South for returning refugees. UNHCR provides direct support to help build the capacity of Iraq's Ministry of Displacement and Migration, responsible for returning Iraqi refugees, IDPs and the country's 100,000 refugees.

UN Emergency Coordination Group Relief assistance has been hampered in the lower south. An attack on an NGO convoy, harassment of Iraqi national staff, and looting of an NGO office in Amara add to the sense of prevailing insecurity which affects operational capacity. Limited humanitarian information had been received concerning Falluja, though reports indicated that the number of wounded seeking treatment had decreased. The humanitarian community continues to monitor the humanitarian situation closely in Najaf, Kut and Karbala. UNICEF, the UN World Health Organisation (WHO) and the Iraqi Ministry of Health have pre-positioned sufficient quantities of medical materials for these cities. A small breakdown of the chlorine cistern was reported in the Water Treatment Plant of Al Hilla, resulting in poisoning of 38 workers and civilians. The situation is being addressed by local authorities.

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Iraq Trust Fund The Steering Committee of the UN Development Group (UNDG) Iraq Trust Fund, composed of Heads of UN agencies - chaired by the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Iraq Mr. Ross Mountain (SRSR a.i.) is expected to review and approve the first batch of projects on Monday 3 May. The UN Clusters have submitted from a pipeline more than 20 projects, an initial set of proposals valued at approximately US\$57 million, for financing from the Trust Fund. A steady stream of additional project proposals are expected to be submitted in the coming weeks, first for peer review by the Cluster Group, and then for approval by the Steering Committee. The Terms of Reference of the Fund's Steering Committee were adopted on Wednesday by the UN Country Team.

HUMAN RIGHTS ►

Abuses of Iraqi Prisoners In a statement by the UN Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan (UNSG) read out by his Spokesperson, Mr. Fred Eckhard (Friday 30 April) Mr. Annan said he was "deeply disturbed by the pictures of Iraqi prisoners being mistreated and humiliated by their guards in the Abu Ghraib prison." In all circumstances, and in all places, the UNSG is strongly opposed to the mistreatment of detainees. Mr. Annan reiterated that, "all detainees should be protected in accordance with the provisions of international human rights law." Mr. Eckhard said the abuse of prisoners could be the kind of thing that would be investigated or would be included in a report on human rights in Iraq that the Acting UN Human Rights High Commissioner (Mr. Bertrand Ramcharan) said last Friday he intended to produce.

UN SECRETARY-GENERAL ►

Special Adviser Responding to a Security Council (SC) briefing by his Special Adviser for Iraq, Mr Lakhdar Brahimi, the UNSG added his voice in appealing to all parties in Iraq to refrain from violence, to respect international humanitarian law, and to give this process of political transition a chance (Tuesday 27 April). "We all want to see the end of occupation. We all want to see Iraq at peace, with itself and with its neighbours and with a genuinely representative government. As Mr. Brahimi said, there will not be a fully representative government until there are free and fair elections, which we all hope will happen in January 2005," said Mr. Annan. The UNSG added, "I also think Mr. Brahimi was quite right to say that violent military action by an occupying Power against the inhabitants of an occupied country will only make matters worse."

Najaf In a press conference held Wednesday 28 April by the UNSG, Mr Annan said, "There had also been talks going on in Najaf, which we had hoped would work out. Of course, our concern is that any assault on Najaf will have really unimaginable consequences and could complicate very much the efforts that we are trying to make in facilitating and in working with the Iraqis to establish an interim Government."

UN MISSIONS ►

Special Adviser, Lakhdar Brahimi At its meeting (Wednesday, 27 April) the SC welcomed with appreciation the briefing and the provisional ideas of the Special Adviser to the UNSG for Iraq, which Mr. Brahimi has submitted as a basis for the formation of an interim Iraqi government to which sovereignty will be transferred on 30 June 2004. In his briefing, Mr. Brahimi said it should "be possible to identify, by the end of May, a group of people respected and acceptable to Iraqis across the country, to form a caretaker government." The Special Adviser stressed that this Caretaker Government, by definition, must be short-lived, and should try to refrain from entering into long-term commitments "that can and should await decision by an elected government".

The Special Adviser also suggested an Iraqi Preparatory Committee (to be established as soon as possible) should convene a National Conference bringing together 1,000-1,500 people representing every province, all political parties, tribal chiefs and leaders, trade and professional unions, universities, women's groups, youth organisations, writers, poets and artists, as well as religious leaders, among many others. The Conference would appoint a Consultative Council to provide advice to the Caretaker Government, suggested Mr. Brahimi. The Special Adviser said he intended to resume consultations in Iraq as soon as possible.

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Electoral Assistance Mission for Iraq The need to establish an Independent Electoral Commission of Iraq (IECI) to conduct the transitional elections was confirmed during the UN Electoral Assessment Mission of April 2004. An independent commission has no precedent in Iraq's history of managing elections. A major priority now is to secure leadership appointments that will establish and maintain the credibility, independence and non-partisan characteristics essential to a successful independent commission.

On 21 April 2004 the Iraqi Governing Council (IGC) unanimously approved a UN proposal which detailed a broad based nomination process to identify, select and appoint the electoral executives for an IECI. The electoral executives include the posts of 7 Electoral Commissioners, a non-voting international Commissioner selected by the UN and a Chief Electoral Officer. The scheduled date for the appointment of persons to these posts is 31 May 2004. The national nomination exercise permits any Iraqi citizen, association or group to nominate suitably qualified persons to the posts of Commissioner and Chief Electoral Officer. From 2-15 May 2004 nominations may be physically submitted at most Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) locations or via an email system through the address: nominations@uniraq.org The form to nominate candidates (in either Arabic or Kurdish language) can be collected from CPA governorate sites, downloaded from the Internet at address: <http://www.electionsiraq.org> Nomination forms will also be widely distributed through civil society groups and various associations.

The UN has deployed an electoral Mission into Iraq to actively monitor and audit the nomination process. The audit team will randomly visit several sites to directly observe the exercise and ensure that procedures to ensure confidentiality are consistently applied. The audit will also assess the handling of sensitive materials and accountability measures. Upon the closing of the submission period the UN will start a technical vetting process to identify a short list of 20 nominees for the Commissioner posts and 5 for the Chief Electoral Officer. The UN will then deploy a team of high profile international experts to interview each short list nominee. The interview process will reduce the nominees to 15 for the Commissioner posts and 3 for Chief Electoral Officer before final selection

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