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“ *The more governments have tried to suppress the flow of information and the peoples' access to it, the more determined and ingenious have become the ways and means of thwarting such restrictions and repression* ”

**Mr. Ad Melkert,
the Special Representative of the
UN Secretary-General for Iraq**

SRSR Ad Melkert witnesses harsh realities of displaced families in Baghdad



Ad Melkert talks to a displaced family during his visit to Al-Awasa settlement, in Baghdad's Al-Karkh district on 21 May 2011.
Photo: Bikem Ekberzade/ UNAMI PIO

Families in the Al-Awasa settlement still recall with pain the day when, fearing for their lives, they had to flee their homes in Abu Ghraib, Al Yusufiya and Al Latifiya and other areas of Baghdad. Most headed toward the west-bank of the Tigris River to the Al-Karkh district, in Baghdad, to endure the plight of the 1.3 million Iraqi internally displaced persons (IDPs).

Some 280 displaced families, who ended up in the Al-Karkh area, built small makeshift homes of mud, roofed with whatever came handy: oil drums, reed, blankets or even scraps of old damaged tanks. A few lucky ones managed to build their houses from bricks.

Most of the families, who made the settlement home, are cramped into one to two rooms with little access to water,

most often of which is collected by illegally hooking up to the main network via jerry-rigged, plastic pipes. The same holds true for obtaining electricity, as many unlawfully tap into the national power grid. As for health care, while there is a clinic near the settlement reputed for its good equipment, displaced families can not benefit from it.

The residents of the Al-Awasa settlement live in two areas: in one part, the land belongs to the Baghdad municipality and in the other, to the Ministry of Defence. Most of these families are not registered with the Ministry of Displacement and Migration, because they either do not possess the necessary documents or they did not meet the Ministry's eligibility criteria. Considered by the authorities to be illegal, most of the 280 families live

in constant fear of being evicted with nowhere to go.

This is the harsh reality that the Special Representative of the UN-Secretary General (SRSG) for Iraq, Mr. Ad Melkert, witnessed first-hand in his visit to the Al-Awasa settlement on 21 May, accompanied by the UN Refugee agency (UNHCR) Acting Representative, Mr. Tarik Kurdi.

As he walked into the settlement, the SRSG saw how the camp had no basic utilities including a sewage system, forcing the families to make crude canals. He was greeted in makeshift homes and spoke to families who struggle to make ends meet, often by occasionally working as daily labourers, constructors or porters. The residents told Mr. Melkert the story of their plight since they fled to the camp due to violence, living day by day, season by season in Baghdad's grueling heat, bitter cold and uncertain future.

The SRSG also witnessed the work UNHCR is undertaking to improve the liv-

ing conditions inside the settlement, by partnering with the Iraqi Salvation Humanitarian Organization, a national NGO. The UN refugee agency and its national partner have been repairing 273 shelters and fumigating 284 units, while building some 120 toilets with septic tanks and providing a total of 117 water tanks and 274 water filters.

Unfortunately, the situation of those in Al-Awasa settlement is far from unique. In Baghdad alone, there are 121 settlements where thousands of displaced families are in dire straits. UNHCR estimates there are around 1.3 million internally displaced Iraqis, with 500,000 of them living in extremely precarious conditions, in desperate need of emergency assistance and protection.

In February 2011, the UN Secretary-General on the rights of IDPs, Mr. Walter Kälin, published a [report](#) on the rights of this vulnerable population following an official visit to Iraq he conducted from 26 September to 3 October 2010. Among the chief recommendations made by Mr.

Kälin, the Government should develop a national action plan to deal with the immediate humanitarian needs and human rights of all communities affected by displacement, including access to basic services, registration as IDPs, delivery of assistance, and mechanisms to identify those most vulnerable.

Measures to bring vital services, such as water, medical care, sanitation and garbage collection, to those in informal settlements should also be addressed, he stressed, while calling on a long-term strategy that provides a comprehensive solution, namely return and local integration, access to education and employment opportunities.

The UN envoy also cautioned federal and regional authorities to ensure that the rights of IDPs are not adversely affected by political or economic factors, while noting that the Government and the international community must provide the sufficient resources and support needed to assist this vulnerable population.

Humanitarian Support

UNHCR hands over 300 houses to internally displaced Iraqis in Diwaniyah

By Gwen Le Coste and Nadjia Hafsa, UNHCR Iraq



UNHCR Representative, Mr. Tarik Kurdi, hands over 300 houses to IDP squatters in Diwaniyah on 30 May 2011. Photo: UNHCR

Iraq has experienced many waves of internal displacement due to conflict, sectarian violence and forced population movements. To date, more than 1.3 million Iraqis remain displaced from their homes inside Iraq and some 470,000 displaced Iraqis strive to survive as squatters in dilapidated public buildings or makeshift settlements.

In Diwaniyah, a city in central Iraq, some 12,000 displaced Iraqis and squatters live in 13 settlements that lack potable water, sewage and garbage collection. Access to schools and health centers is also generally a challenge considering that most displaced families don't have an income.

Since early 2010, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Iraq and its implementing partners, in cooperation with the Ministry of Mi-

gration and Displacement (MoDM), have been providing humanitarian assistance to the most vulnerable people in this governorate. The assistance included the provision of non-food items, legal aid services, water and sanitation interventions. The organization also works closely with the central and local government to identify durable solutions for displaced families including the prospect of their integration in local communities.

Following a visit by Mr. António Guterres, the High Commissioner for Refugees, to Iraq in January 2011, and discussions held with the Iraqi Government, the local government in Diwaniyah approved the allocation of 4,200 land plots in Al-Ansaf village to internally displaced and vulnerable families who live in public buildings and land in the governorate. This land allocation constituted a unique opportunity for the displaced families and squatters in Diwaniyah who have been living under threats of eviction.

The local government also requested UNHCR to construct 192 housing units for these families. The locality's strong commitment to provide all associated services on the site, made UNHCR decide

not only to construct 192 houses, but to increase the number of units to 300 homes.

The refugee agency and its implementing partner, the Danish Refugee Council (DRC), immediately swung into action. By 30 May, UNHCR Acting Representative Tarik Kurdi was able to travel to Diwaniyah to officially hand over all 300 residences to these most vulnerable families in Al-Ansaf village who are now proud homeowners.

A high-level delegation of the MoDM, the Governor of Diwaniyah, officials from the Governorate, as well as representatives of UNHCR's implementing partners in Diwaniyah, attended the ceremony.

The Governor of Diwaniyah and the Deputy Minister of MoDM, Dr Salam Al-Khafaji, thanked the international community, particularly UNHCR and DRC, for their contribution. They also expressed their wishes to see such initiatives replicated in other districts of the locality. In an effort to keep this integration momentum, the Deputy Minister, Dr. Al-Khafaji, announced the allocation of 20 hectares of land for housing projects in favor of the internally displaced families in Diwani-

yah who are willing to locally integrate in their location of displacement.

While touring the site, UNHCR Representative Kurdi visited the newly-built houses and spoke to many beneficiaries whose dream of owning a safe and sturdy home had come true. Many families informed him that now that they feel safe in their new homes and that all they need is a regular income which will enable them to live a decent life.

UNHCR stands ready to support initiatives of local integration of displaced persons and urges the central government to achieve their strategy to end the plight of the displaced and vulnerable families also residing in public complexes and buildings in Iraq. The UN refugee agency also calls on the Government of Iraq to ensure resources are committed for larger scale projects similar to that of Diwaniyah.

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World Press Freedom Day

Ad Melkert calls on Government to fully protect freedom of expression in Iraq



The Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Iraq, Mr. Ad Melkert. Photo: Bikem Ekberzade/ UNAMI PIO

Speaking on the occasion of World Press Freedom Day, celebrated on 3 May in Baghdad, the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General (SRSG) for Iraq, Mr. Ad Melkert, stressed that freedom of opinion and expression is clearly protected by Article 38 of the Iraqi Constitution and called on the Government to ensure that this right is fully protected. The SRSG also urged the Council of Representatives to support the development of an access to information law in line with international standards and emphasized that the right to freedom of opinion and expression should only be restricted as clearly defined exceptions, not as a rule.

Addressing an audience mostly made up of journalists, Mr. Melkert praised the Iraqi media, which he described as "vibrant and diverse, with the potential of taking the lead in the Middle East and the wider region." He also paid tribute to the media professionals who lost their lives in the pursuit of the right to know and those who have been and still are subjected to persecution, intimidation and violence.

On this year's theme of the Word Press Freedom Day, "21st Century Media: New Frontiers, New Barriers," Mr. Melkert said: "We have seen the impact that the new media is having in countries across the globe – and in recent months, we have seen its

effect particularly in countries throughout North Africa and the Middle East, including Iraq. Mobile telephones, and widening access to the internet, including the increasing popularity of blogging, tweeting and social forums, are ensuring the greater participation by all Iraqis in public affairs—thereby contributing meaningfully to the development and strengthening of Iraqi democracy.”

Mr. Melkert also addressed the challenges related to the new media, including the slow response of the legal and regulatory framework to the rapid changes that are taking place across the world and the need to ensure that the access and flow of information remains free and unhindered.

The UNAMI chief also noted the repressive responses that some states are imposing on the new media, including censorship, cyber-surveillance, and digital harassment, while others are still using active repression of journalists and ordinary peo-

ple through threats, intimidation, harassment and in some instances, with physical abuse or murder.

“However we have equally seen the futility of such repressive responses: the more governments have tried to suppress the flow of information and the peoples’ access to it, the more determined and ingenious have become the ways and means of thwarting such restrictions and repression,” he warned.

The SRSG stressed that the freedom of opinion and expression is protected expressly by Article 38 of the Constitution and that according to the Iraqi law this freedom may only be restricted to legitimately protect the rights and reputation of others, and to protect public order and morality.

“As Iraqi democracy develops and takes root, I would call on the Government of Iraq to ensure that the right to freedom of opinion and expression of all Iraq’s people

is fully protected – that any person who is found responsible for acts of threats or intimidation aimed at limiting the lawful exercise of the right must be held accountable according to the law,” he said.

As for the restriction of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, Mr. Melkert emphasized that it should only be restricted as clearly defined exceptions, not as a rule.

He urged the Parliament to support the development of an Access to Information law in line with international standards. “This is an important step in fighting corruption, one of the principle demands of Iraqi citizens,” Mr. Melkert noted.

This year’s celebration for World Press Freedom Day 2011 took place at the Oil Cultural Center, in Baghdad, and was marked by the official announcement of the formation of the first Iraqi Bloggers Union to be called “Iraq First.”

World Press Freedom Day

Iraq celebrates World Press Freedom Day: First Iraqi Bloggers Union launched

By George Papagiannis, UNESCO Iraq



Members of Iraq’s newly launched Bloggers Union uploading updates on the celebration of the World Freedom Day’s events celebrated in Baghdad on 3 May 2011. Photo: Mustafa Saad

The UNESCO Office for Iraq held its celebration for World Press Freedom Day 2011 at the Oil Cultural Center in Baghdad on 3 May. Iraqi bloggers seized on this year’s theme, “21st Century Media: New Frontiers, New Barriers” to announce the formation of the first Iraqi Bloggers Union to be called “Iraq First.”

The announcement was made by blogger Ammar Bin Hatim, who outlined the Union’s charter before a crowd of hundreds of participants. The objective of the bloggers’ union, said Hatim, “is to achieve the values of justice, freedom and political independence and cultural development of all segments of Iraqi society, including the rights of minorities to live in dignity and freedom in Iraq.”

In his keynote address, Mufid Al Jazairi, a former Minister of Culture, Chair of the Parliament’s Media and Culture Commit-

tee between 2004 and 2010, and journalist, was particularly concerned over the absence of a Right to Information law. "We had set a goal last year to have a law passed by this year...we need to double our efforts because the right to information is critical to freedom of expression," he said.

The Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Iraq, Mr. Ad Melkert urged the Iraqi parliament to support the development of an access to information law in line with international standards. He also called on the Government to ensure that the right to the freedom of expression and opinion is fully protected and emphasised that this right should only be restricted as clearly defined exceptions, not as a rule.

The day was also punctuated by the somber realities for journalists working in

Iraq. A moment of silence was observed to remember those reporters who were killed because of their work. The Journalistic Freedoms Observatory, which released its annual report on the state of freedom of expression in Iraq at the event, reported that 12 journalists were killed in the country since the last World Press Freedom Day, an average of one a month.

"This is one of the reasons why World Press Freedom Day is important. It gives us an opportunity to gauge the health of freedom of expression and freedom of the press, to draw attention to the challenges that they face on a daily basis and to bolster our efforts where necessary," said Mr. Mohamed Djelid, Director of the UNESCO Iraq office.

The event included discussions on issues related to the promotion of media as a

platform for civic participation and democratic discourse, and the implications of new media on freedom of expression in Iraq. The event also featured a gallery of photojournalism and editorial cartoons.

The main UNESCO event commemorating the day was held in Washington DC this year. UNESCO is the only UN agency with a mandate to defend freedom of expression and press freedom. Article 1 of its Constitution requires the Organization to "further universal respect for justice, for the rule of law and for the human rights and fundamental freedoms which are affirmed for the peoples of the world, without distinction of race, sex, language or religion, by the Charter of the United Nations."

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Development

Ad Melkert: Social and economic future of Iraq will be determined by Iraqis



Ad Melkert participates in a three-day conference on Iraq's economic future on 24-26 May at Iraq's Parliament in Baghdad.
Photo: Bikem Ekberzade/UNAMI PIO

In a [statement](#) at the opening of the National Conference of Economic, Social and Government Stakeholders held on 24 – 26 May at Iraq's parliament, the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General for Iraq, Mr. Ad Melkert, said the vari-

ous socio-economic challenges facing Iraq require serious efforts to reach a consensus on the necessary policy reforms and an open and honest debate on these reforms and the institutions that must implement them.

"Building an equitable market economy is a long-term process. There is no single socio-economic reform which will on its own facilitate a quick transformation into a fully functioning market economy. Different reforms are needed at the same time," said Mr. Melkert, building on his own experience as a former Minister of Social Affairs and Employment in The Netherlands and on his work with the International Labour Organisation.

The SRSR listed the following steps as key examples of the reforms: simplifying the ability to do business in Iraq; allowing labour to organize without interference; introducing corruption abatement policies; increasing access to finance; due process and the rule of law; and, corporatizing state-owned enterprises.

"Each of these reforms are catalysts that work with each other in creating the best environment possible for economic development and the generation of employment," he added.

Mr. Melkert also stressed the importance of inclusive policy-making through broad participation, vigorous and open debate

about the direction of socio-economic policies in the country. This will help ensure a greater diversity of opinion and acceptance of the final product, including on the basis of the inevitable and necessary compromise, he said.

"While it is incumbent upon government policy-makers to include non-government stakeholders in the policy-making process, it is equally important for these non-government stakeholders (business and labour) to participate in the policy-making process in a serious and transparent manner. Business and labour associations must represent the positions and opinions of their membership and not narrow personal interests," the SRSRG told the conference.

Reflecting on the objectives and commitments that would benefit Iraqis, he summarized them in five key points:

1) Reducing the incidences of youth unemployment, compounded by the rapid growth in the labour force.

2) Reinforcing democratic governance and social change through freedom of association and collective bargaining.

3) Enhancing social justice, including in the fair sharing of wealth that workers contribute in creating and establishing the floor of social protection that is financially sustainable.

4) Empowering trade unions and civil society actors to cooperate in a wider social movement.

5) Promoting robust social dialogue structures and institutions – including employee associations and trade unions – that can exercise effective checks and balances and thus enforce fair and participative governance.

In closing, Mr. Melkert emphasized that the social and economic future of Iraq will be determined by Iraqis and that the UN, World Bank and the international community can play a supporting role in assisting the government and the country's citizens in bringing about the change they seek in their social and economic future.

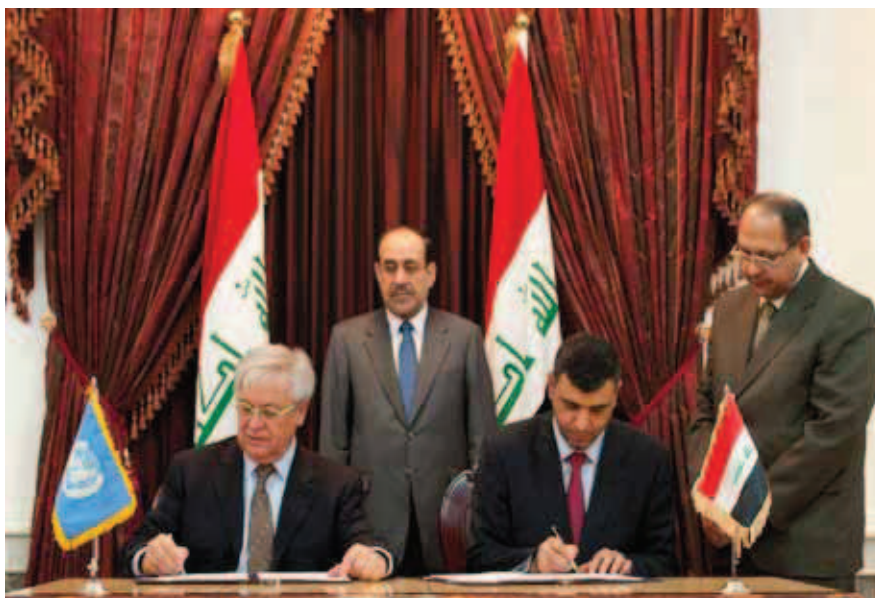
"It is through conferences such as this in which all stakeholders have legitimate input that Iraqis will determine the course they seek to take in these matters. I wish you wholeheartedly a successful conference and pledge UN support for the next stages," Mr. Melkert concluded.

The Conference was organized by the International Labour Organization, The UN Office for Projects Support and the World Bank in partnership with Iraqi partners. It was attended by a large number of members of the Government, parliament, business and labour.

Special Visit

UN-HABITAT Executive Director visits Iraq

By Fiona McCluney, UN-HABITAT Iraq



Dr. Joan Clos, Executive Director of UN-Habitat (left) and Iraqi Minister of Construction and Housing, Muhammad Al Darriji (right) sign the Memorandum of Understanding between the UN-Habitat and the Government of Iraq in the presence of Iraq's PM Nouri Al-Maliki (center), at the PM's residence in Baghdad on 31 May 2011. Photo: Bikem Ekberzade/ UNAMI PIO

The Executive Director of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT) and Under Secretary General of the United Nations, Dr. Joan Clos, accompanied by the Deputy

Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Iraq/ Resident Coordinator / Humanitarian Coordinator, Ms. Christine McNab, conducted a five-day visit to Iraq during the period 30 May - 2 June 2011.

In his first visit to a field mission since assuming leadership of UN-HABITAT, Dr. Clos hailed the achievements of the Iraqi-UN-HABITAT partnership on issues related to urban planning, governance, land management, pro-poor housing and basic services.

In Baghdad, he held meetings with Iraq's Prime Minister, Nouri Al Maliki, the Minister of Construction and Housing and the Minister of Planning. They discussed Iraq's vision towards improving housing conditions, better functioning cities and strengthening the private and public sectors.

During Dr. Clos' visit, UN-HABITAT and the Ministry of Construction and Housing signed on Tuesday 31 May, a Memorandum of Understanding in the presence of the Prime Minister. The document outlines key areas of collaboration in the implementation of Iraq's National Housing Policy, especially in the pro-poor aspects of the policy, including informal settlement upgrading, special housing programmes for the most vulnerable, as well as improving the enabling environment for private sector and others to engage substantively in the housing sector through improved ac-

cess to land and housing finance.

"Nearly 70 per cent of Iraqis live in cities. That number is growing. It is important to take an optimistic view and embrace urbanization by strengthening planning and local governance. Well-planned and managed cities are centres of economic growth and job creation," said Dr. Clos at the ceremony.

Following the signing, a high level seminar on urbanization, land and housing was held in Baghdad at the Council of Ministers with the participation of representatives of diplomatic missions in Iraq and senior government officials. The forum also provided for the launch of "Urban Baghdad: Impact of Conflict on Daily Life" report; which was

prepared jointly by UN-HABITAT with International Organization for Migration and UNAMI. The document highlights the consequences of conflict and displacement on the fragmentation of the city and the deteriorating access to basic services.

On 1 June, UN-Habitat chief continued his visit to Erbil, in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq where he met with the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) Deputy Prime Minister, the Head of the Department of Foreign Relations, the Minister of Planning and the Governor of Erbil. He discussed a number of issues with KRG officials, including the growing urbanization of the region and the means to reinforce urban planning capacities.

The Erbil Housing Strategy was officially launched by Dr. Clos during the visit. The Strategy outlines the KRG's approach to address the housing needs for lower-income, female-headed and other disadvantaged households in Erbil.

Appointed Executive Director of the UN-HABITAT at the level of Undersecretary-General by the UN General Assembly, Dr. Joan Clos, from Spain, took office at the Programme's headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya on 18 October 2010.

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UN report

UN report calls on Government to improve the life all Baghdad residents

By Peter Rice, UNAMI – Information & Analysis Unit



A woman is stopped at checkpoint in Baghdad. Photo: Jamal Penjweny/2010

A new UN report titled "Urban Baghdad: Impact of Conflict on Daily Life", has called on the Government of Iraq to develop sustainable policies for improving everyday life for Baghdad residents in collaboration with national and international partners. Developed by IOM, UN-HABITAT and UNAMI, the document highlights the displacement and fragmentation of the city caused by conflict, as well as poor access to basic services.

Reflecting on Baghdad's challenges, the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq, Ms. Christine McNab said: "Baghdad's current housing situation reflects not only the growing pains of cities globally, but also the extraordinary additional stresses experienced in cities throughout Iraq resulting from years of conflict, sanctions and displacement. This represents one of the Government of Iraq's most immediate challenges."

The violence saw tens of thousands of Baghdad's residents killed and more than a tenth of the city's population displaced. Some 48,000 families live in 136 camps dotted around the city. "Baghdad's displaced and returnee families still face numerous difficulties and an uncertain future. It is essential that we work hand-in-hand with the Government of Iraq to create lasting solutions for these vulnerable populations," said Mr. Mike Pillinger, Chief of IOM's Iraq Mission.

Access to basic services has been hampered by thirty years of conflicts and sanctions. Housing shortages and prolonged power cuts impact on living conditions, and less than a quarter of households have reliable access to drinking water. Outside the home, recreational activities and facilities have been closed or off-limits since 2003. Spaces normally used by families have become dumping grounds or are filled with sewage and stagnant water.

“Overcrowding, the lack of basic services and the lack of recreational and open spaces affect not only the quality of life in Baghdad but also the city lifestyle, its cultural activities and social norms. As the security situation improves efforts can now focus on harnessing the private sector and civil society in plans necessary for the future,” said Ms. Fiona McCluney, UN-HABITAT’s Iraq Programme Manager.

Conditions have improved since the height of the violence in 2006-2007. Conflict-related deaths have dropped, and nearly a third of those displaced have returned home. Improved security has allowed greater freedom of movement and recreation in daily life.

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A boy rides his bicycle alongside a strip of T-Walls in Baghdad. Photo: Jamal Penjweny/2010

Development

UN-HABITAT conference provides new roadmap for Iraq’s local government

By Richard Forster for UN-HABITAT -Iraq



Members of the panel at the opening session of the UN-Habitat Conference on Iraqi governance held on 15 May 2011 in Amman, Jordan. Photo: Osman/ Total View Photo Centre

Key representatives of the Iraqi government, including Mr. Is-tebraq al-Shauk, Senior Deputy Minister for Construction and Hous-

ing, Mr. Kamil Chadirchi, Deputy Minister for Administrative Affairs, and Mr. Ayad al Safy, Deputy Minister for Technical Affairs, were in Amman, Jor-

dan, on 15 May to attend a high-level UN-HABITAT conference to determine the future of Iraqi governance.

“This conference represents the extent of cooperation, and of joint and serious action between the Iraqi Government and United Nations agencies to concentrate the concept of decentralized government in Iraq,” said Deputy Minister al-Shauk in his opening address.

Organized by the UN-HABITAT Iraq office in Amman, the conference brought together eminent speakers from the World Bank, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, and United Nations agencies together with experienced practitioners in the field of local governance. It aimed to set out a roadmap for Iraq to move towards a system of effective decentralized local government. All 18 of Iraq’s local provinces,

or governorates, were represented at the conference by members of the Iraqi Local Government Association.

"The objective of this conference is to provide an opportunity for Iraq Local Government Association representatives to learn, experience and benefit from the process of decentralization, local government building and service delivery practised in several neighbouring and selected countries", said Mr. Suman Kumar Karna, Local Governance and Decentralization Specialist with the UN-HABITAT Iraq Programme in Amman. "The conference will provide a focused practical perspective on how decentralization in urban areas promotes local government as an effective tool for service delivery."

The experience of decentralized governance in Iraq has been minimal. After adopting a federal system in 2003, the Republic of Iraq's Constitution of 2005 furthered the reform process by establishing a model of decentralized political and administrative government through devolution of power to eighteen provinces (governorates). However, many challenges remain, in particular, the devolution of authority for the delivery of services and an inter-governmental policy on the transfer of revenues to local governments from oil and other resources.

Iraq must be patient as it moves to decentralized local governance

One of the speakers, Dr. Ehtisham Ahmad from the London School of Economics,

said that while there need to be political decisions made on how oil revenues are shared, it is also vital for Iraq's local governments to have their own revenue raising options.

"It is important that local governments have own source revenues with control over rates as this ensures efficient use of transfers and spending and makes local governments fully accountable", said Dr. Ahmad.

A common point raised by the speakers is that Iraq must be patient as it moves from a very centralized regime to decentralized local governance. "The challenge is not to design the programme, but to breach the gap between theory and practice", said Dr. Shabbir Cheema, Director at the East-West Centre in Honolulu. "With decentralization you need to be patient. Indonesia went through 25 years of failure before it got to where it is today."

Anwar Shah of the World Bank highlighted the risks if Iraq's provinces are empowered too greatly and said China could provide guidelines and practical pointers to Iraq in developing its decentralized system of government.

"China has made remarkable progress on poverty reduction and has 89 per cent of its public employees at the local level," said Dr. Shah. "Past dependencies make these changes difficult in Iraq, but we owe it to the millions of citizens to keep on trying."



UN-Habitat Conference participants listen to speakers. Photo: Osman/Total View Photo Centre

Other speakers provided case studies from Europe (Ed Cornies of UNDP), from India (Professor Dinesh Mehta and Professor Om Prakash) and from Indonesia (Professor Tommy Firman) to explain how local governance can be made effective for urban communities. While all of these studies are country specific, they can provide useful indicators for Iraq in particular where decentralization initiatives were not successful, said Professor Om Prakash.

The discussions and debate from the conference will be published in the form of a toolkit, which will serve as a guiding tool to Iraqi representatives in the field. In addition, later this year there will be two days of field tours in Turkey where participants from Iraq will have the opportunity to see the results of the decentralization process on the ground. The tour, to a region just outside of Istanbul, will provide an insight into the challenges faced in the decentralization process and the means by which solutions are achieved in the field.

"The devil is in the detail and we now need to look at getting the details right on the functional and territorial assignments of responsibilities for the different services in Iraq," said Ms. Fiona McCluney, UN-HABITAT's Programme Manager for Iraq, in her closing remarks. "If Iraq is to move from being solely dependent on oil as the main source of revenue, how cities function and are being managed, is going to be a key issue and considering this in the context of where functional responsibilities lie, is the major theme we need to work on."

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Road safety a health priority in Iraq

By Ruba Hikmat WHO Iraq



Dr. Hawrami, KRG Minister of Health (right), Dr. Hussain, WHO Iraq Representative (center) and Mr. Hamasha (left), WHO technical Officer, in a visit to Erbil Emergency Hospital. Photo: WHO

A new report launched on 9 May 2011 by the World Health Organization (WHO) reveals that by 2020 it is predicted that road traffic crashes will take the lives of 1.9 million people annually, up from nearly 1.3 million today. Half of those killed are pedestrians, cyclists and motorcyclists and more than 90 per cent of fatalities occur in low-income and middle-income countries, according to "The Global Status Report on Road Safety".

In Iraq, road traffic accidents rank among the major causes of death.

At least 75,000 people died during the period 1979 – 2005 due to road traffic crashes. Due to war, sanctions and conflicts during the past decade, road safety has not been considered as a top priority of the Ministry of Health.

As the security situation started improving over the past few years, the Iraqi Ministry of Health began improving the quality standards of emergency services that will help save lives. In collaboration with WHO Iraq and other partners, the Ministry is working on improving health system in Iraq by improv-

ing the quality of medical services of pre-hospital care, essential hospital care and rehabilitation services, in addition to establishing strong blood transfusion services that will provide adequate and safe blood to every person in need.

On 10 and 17 May, the ministries of Health in Iraq and Kurdistan Region Government in Iraq and WHO launched "The Decade of Action for Road Safety 2011–2020" report at the national level. The report highlights the actions that are needed to make Iraq's roads safer, including concrete measures to improve the safety of roads and vehicles, enhance emergency services and build up road safety management in general.

The document also calls for increased road safety legislations and enforcing the use of helmets, seat-belts, child restraints and avoiding drinking and driving and speeding.

WHO Iraq stresses that it is the time to start developing future transport policies across Iraq through collective efforts that will require the political commitment, the implementation of good practices, spreading a culture of safety and the collaboration of transport, health, education, communications sectors, among many others.

"Strengthening emergency services will not only save lives but also reduce human suffering and preserve valuable economic assets," said Dr. Jaffar Hussain, WHO Iraq Representative in a visit to Khan Zan Urgent Aid Center on 17 May. Built in 2007 with WHO's financial and technical support, the centre serves the highway road between Erbil and Salah El-din to ensure the provision of emergency and specialized medical services to road traffic victims and other patients.

The WHO global report on road safety is the first broad assessment of the road safety situation in 178 countries, using data drawn from a standardized survey.

For more information, please contact Dr Faris Bunni, Medical Officer, bunif@irq.emro.who.int and Mr. Kelvin Khaw, Report and donor Relation officer, khowk@irq.emro.who.int

Gender

Iraqi Government committed to increasing resources for survivors of gender-based violence

By Rachael Spence, UNDP Iraq



WHO staff discuss gathering information to help the Directorates for Tracing Violence Against Women. Photo: UNDP

The Directorates for Tracing Violence Against Women are an important part of the Kurdistan Regional Government's response to Violence Against Women in Iraq as they ensure that victims have access to medical, legal and police support. On 24-25 May 2011, the leadership and technical staff from the Directorates met in Dohuk, Iraq, with the support of UNDP Iraq technical staff, to develop a strategic plan and harmonize efforts to train the Directorate

staff on how to advocate for legislation and support healthier families.

As part of the strategic plan, the staff discussed implementing one, coordinated database to anonymously collect information about cases of violence that are brought to the Directorates. This information will help the body toward conducting research on the parts of Iraqi society that are more likely to face violence. With this information, the Directorates can reach out more effectively



Directorate staff prepare for meetings on strategic planning and the coordination of statistics collection throughout the Kurdistan region. Photo: UNDP

to victims, prevent violence by raising awareness about the issue among perpetrators of violence and advocate for laws so that police can better address violence in the community.

There are more than seven Director-

ates for Tracing Violence Against Women throughout Kurdistan, including the General Directorate for Tracing Violence Against Women in Erbil. The coordination of services and yearly plans are key to building on the Directorates' positive relationships with the local communi-

ties. Two new Directorates will open in the Dohuk Governorate in the coming months, one of which will be lead by the first ever female Director of a Directorate for Tracing Violence Against Women, First Lieutenant Rupak.

The Offices for Tracing Violence Against Women in the Kurdistan Region were developed by the Iraqi government four years ago to provide multiple services in one location to survivors of gender-based violence. The Federal Government has also developed resource centres for survivors of violence in Baghdad called the "Family Protection Directorates."

UNDP Iraq has been supporting the efforts of both the Kurdistan Regional Government and Federal Government through the "Family Support, Justice and Security" Programme. The initiative aims to strengthen access to justice for survivors of violence through the drafting of legislation, capacity building of Directorate staff and development of reintegration mechanisms, such as shelters and economic empowerment programmes.

For more information, please contact Ms. Nahid Husein, UNDP Iraq Project Manager: nahid.hussein@undp.org

Health

Health Ministry implements Basic Health Service Package

By Ruba Hikmat, WHO Iraq



Dr. Hussain, WHO Representative, during his visit to the Erbil Brayeti Center. Photo: WHO

Evolving from General Practice, Family Practice is an effective form of primary care that provides continuing, comprehensive health care by delivering a range of acute, chronic and preventive medical services to individuals of all ages.

In addition to diagnosing and treating illness, family physicians also provide preventive care, including routine check-ups, health-risk assessments, immunization, screening tests, and support in maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

Family Practice is a recently defined discipline, which does not exist in many of the developing countries. In Iraq, the Ministry of Health has taken a solid step forward by adopting the new World Health Organization Eastern Mediterranean Region initiative involving the implementation of the Basic Health Service Package, which is being introduced as a pilot project in Baghdad, Kirkuk, Missan and Erbil governorates.

The initiative aims at assuring universal, equitable and efficient access to essential health services for every individual,

especially the most vulnerable (children, women and elderly). It is the tie where health care delivery comes into direct contact with the community, strong participatory planning and close and effective communication with all segments of the community.

During a field-monitoring mission to Erbil in May, 2011, the WHO Representative, Dr. Syed Jaffar Hussain, along with international WHO experts, paid a visit to the first center in the North implementing the Family Practice Approach, the Bryati Family Health Center. The facility is located in Erbil District and the visit provided insights on the services provided, as well as the challenges faced at this point of the center's development.

The Bryati Primary Health Care Center was directed to operate as a Family Health Center in the spring of 2010. After defin-

ing its catchment area according to the capacity of the center, all staff (medical and administrative) was trained and an electronic medical record system, a special paper medical record file, and a financial system were designed. The center then offered accessible high quality and timely consultation and diagnostic services by family physicians.

The Center is showing excellent results and gaining the community's trust and positive feedback as it implements this new model of that focuses on a patient-centered approach, community participation, and quality. 20,000 individuals are now registered members in the center, taking their appointments either by phone, by direct visit or via email. A computerized, intranet based, health information system, containing all detailed relevant information on each member is in

place, enhancing efficiency and the quality of diagnosis and follow up. The marked increase of in x-ray and medical check-up labs contributes to the maintenance of health and prevention.

The Bryati Family Health Center presents a success story in the making and serves as model for more health centers in Erbil, the other districts, and eventually Iraq as a whole to replicate and evolve.

The adoption of Family Practices at the policy level and their implementation in Iraq will contribute to the achievements of national objectives as articulated in the National Development Plan 2010-2014, as well as the Millennium Development Goals for Iraq.

For more information please contact Dr. Aqila Noori, Medical Officer, WHO Iraq: nooria@irq.emro.who.int

Rule of Law

Kurdistan Bar Association legal aid workshop: Lawyers explore legal aid arrangements

By Shawqi Younis and Mark Aiken, UNDP Iraq



UNDP legal aid workshop for Kurdistan Bar Association held in Erbil on 25 May 2011. Photo: UNDP

Most people feel out of place in a courtroom. The environment is unfamiliar, judicial rules are complicated, and the stakes in any case can be high – the court decides if someone is guilty or innocent, whether they will go to prison or go free, or whether a defendant will be ordered to pay compensation or fines.

For members of vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, the hardship is even more severe, as they frequently cannot afford to pay for a private lawyer to assist them. While some NGOs and lawyers do provide free assistance to clients, in Iraq lawyers have no professional obligation to do so.

The revision of the Kurdistan Bar Association Act was the ideal opportunity for the lawyers to explore the contributions they can make to their community, by assisting vulnerable people through legal aid schemes.

With the support of technical experts from the UN Development Programme (UNDP) Iraq and the Regional Reconstruction Team, UNDP convened a workshop on 25 April 2011 for the members of the Bar Association drafting team. The team studied the practical legal issues experienced by vulnerable people in Kurdistan, the current legal framework for human rights in Iraq, explored international best practice, and reviewed relevant human rights standards and Bar Acts from other countries.

The committee also studied different models of legal aid, including professional obligations for all lawyers to do some legal aid work each year, court based legal aid schemes, using full time salaried lawyers (a 'public defenders' model) compared to paying private lawyers to take legal aid cases on an ad-hoc basis. The court based legal aid schemes are also being piloted by UNDP Iraq, with the support of the European Union.

Following the workshop, the Bar Association made further revisions to the draft Kurdistan Bar Act, to strengthen the roles of lawyers in providing legal assistance to vulnerable and disadvantaged people. The Bar Association also requested the ongoing support of UNDP Iraq to improve their knowledge of the international human rights con-

ventions which are applicable to Iraq, and international best practice of Bar Associations and legal aid.

UNDP Iraq is committed to providing this continued support in partnership with the European Union, as part of the European Union's 'Support to Rule of Law and Justice' programme. The initia-

tive aims to improve the effectiveness and accessibility of the Iraqi justice system, and is implemented by UNDP Iraq.

For more information, please contact Ms. Christine Fowler, Senior Programme Adviser - Rule of Law, UNDP Iraq: Christine.fowler@undp.org; +962 777 148 336

Mine Action

IOM, Mines Advisory Group rehabilitate water system

By Bertram Chambers, IOM Iraq



The Mines Advisory Group team safely remove mines from a small village in the governorate of Sulaymaniyah in May 2011.
Photo: IOM

The Mines Advisory Group (MAG) has partnered with International Organization for Migration (IOM) Iraq to safely remove landmines from a karez restoration site in the northern governorate of Sulaymaniyah.

Since March 2011, IOM has been working to restore traditional "karez" systems in the Halabja district of Sulaymaniyah. Karez are ancient traditional water systems which provide rural areas with irrigation and drinking water in a sustainable manner.

At the beginning of May, a team of IOM staff and local community members excavating a karez in a small village discovered several landmines scattered around the site. IOM immediately contacted the local office of

MAG and a joint assessment was undertaken to evaluate the situation. The mines were found to be over 20 years old, and had recently washed down into the irrigation site from a nearby mountain.

A team of experts from MAG returned to the karez soon after the assessment and conducted a full demining operation to clear the work site of any landmines or other dangerous remnants of war. After marking the area and constructing a stone wall to prevent any further mines from being washed down from a higher elevation, the site was declared clear and the karez team was able to safely return to work. "IOM and MAG have doubly benefitted our village" said Mr. Kamaran, the owner of the karez.

"Now we will have both fresh water and an area safe from landmines."

To further educate and protect both the members of the communities and IOM staff, IOM and MAG followed up on the demining operation by holding a Mine Risk Education training session. The session was held on 10 May in Halabja city, and was attended by 16 community members, four IOM staff and a representative from the military. A team of MAG trainers instructed participants on the various types of mines and other explosives common to Iraq, and what to do should they encounter one.

"We sincerely appreciate MAG's assistance with demining our karez site and educating our staff and members of the community on the risks posed by mines," said IOM Project Manager Lucie Dupertuis.

The project is supported by the US Commander's Emergency Response Program and the initiative is to cover the restoration of 10 karezes.

As a member of the UN Country Team (UNCT) for Iraq, IOM Iraq works closely with the United Nations system and the Iraqi authorities in support of the Iraqi National Development Plan 2010 - 2014, and is integrated into all sector outcome teams of the UNCT Coordination Structure.

For further information on the Mines Advisory Group, please visit:

www.maginternational.org

For more information on IOM Iraq, please contact Bertram Chambers: bchambers@iom.int

Standing Consultation Mechanism Continues Meetings Under UNAMI Auspices

Under the auspices of UNAMI, the Standing Consultation Mechanism met on 25 May 2011 to advance the resolution of the Disputed Internal Boundaries issues. Attention was given to the security arrangements in the respective areas and ways for expediting the holding of provincial council elections in Kirkuk and for normalizing relations between parties in Ninewa.

The participants reiterated the importance of continued local engagement and expanded participation in resolving outstanding issues.

"UNAMI was pleased by the open discussion and constructive atmosphere and welcomed the commitment of the parties to resolve issues related to the disputed areas," said the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General for Iraq (SRSG), Mr. Ad Melkert.

The meeting was facilitated by SRSG Melkert and attended by Dr. Rowsch Shawis, Deputy Prime Minister, Dr. Rafe Al-Issawi, Finance Minister and Council of Representatives' members Mr. Hassan Al-Sunaid and Mr. Jaber Al-Jaberi.

Kadem Al-Sahir Appointed UNICEF Ambassador to Iraq



UNICEF announced on 9 May 2011 the appointment of renowned Iraqi singer, Kadem Al-Sahir, as its Ambassador to Iraq. Photo: UNICEF 20110

UNICEF announced on 9 May 2011 the appointment of renowned Iraqi singer, Kadem Al-Sahir, as its Ambassador to Iraq. Making his first visit to Iraq in 14 years for

the occasion, Mr. Al-Sahir launched his new song "Together for Children," calling on all segments of Iraqi society to come together to turn the ongoing hardships faced by Iraq's children into opportunities for them.

Mr. Al-Sahir's music over the past 25 years has led to his immense popularity within Iraq, across the Middle East and North Africa and globally. As UNICEF's Ambassador to Iraq, Al-Sahir will focus on raising awareness and mobilizing support to respond to the needs of the most vulnerable children across the country in order to build an equitable society where all 15 million of Iraq's children have equal opportunities to realize their full potential.

Mr. Al-Sahir was born in the northern Iraqi city of Mosul in 1957. He has received many awards and honors of his exceptional talent and creativity. He is UNICEF's first ever Ambassador to Iraq.

Amman Institute, UN-HABITAT continue to strengthen leadership skills of Iraqis

On 15-30 May 2011, the Amman Institute for Urban Development (AI) in partnership with UN-HABITAT held a training for 36 members from the Iraq Local Government Association (ILGA) on leadership skills and good governance.

The ILGA is a non-profit organization based in Baghdad, with branch offices in all of Iraq's 18 governorates. The well-established Association is known for its work in policy research and advocacy to support local governments.

The two back-to-back training courses included soft skills such as leadership, communication and negotiation, in addition to site visits to the Amman Municipality where trainees meet with AI technical planning experts exposing trainees to urban planning initiatives in Jordan.

The courses are part of an agreement of cooperation between UN-HABITAT and the Amman Institute under the Local Government Association and Urban Development Capacity Building Project.

Helping NGOs in Iraq get to work



UNOPS and ICNL training Iraqis on NGO registration procedures, Erbil 2011. Photo: UNOPS

After a new Iraqi NGO law entered into force in March 2010, UN Office for Project Services (UNOPS) and the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL) have worked in cooperation with the NGOs Directorate and NGOs themselves, to prepare a registration awareness project for NGOs.

The first priority of the project has been to develop simplified and more user-friendly registration forms for NGOs. New forms are about to be endorsed by the NGOs Directorate and will soon be available on its website at: www.ngoao.gov.iq.

The project is also focusing on providing training and producing a handbook to help NGOs obtain and renew their registration certificates. Training on these procedures will be conducted jointly by mixed teams from the NGOs Directorate and NGOs themselves and is expected to reach over 600 NGOs in all Iraqi governorates.

By mid-May 2011, UNOPS and ICNL began workshops in Erbil to prepare trainers before they travel around the country throughout the coming months. The handbook to guide NGOs through the registration procedures has been distributed to NGOs. This first training session was attended by representatives from the government, parliament and civil society.

Ministry, UN-HABITAT focus on strategy in support of displaced Iraqis

UN-HABITAT, in partnership with the Ministry of Displacement and Migration, held a workshop on 10-12 May 2011, in Erbil,

in Iraq Kurdistan region, to support the Ministry's preparation of a strategy for durable shelter solutions for internally displaced Iraqis. The forum resulted in a final draft of the Longer Term Shelter Solutions Strategy.

The event was attended by 23 participants from various relevant ministries, Baghdad Provincial Council, the Real Estate Bank, the National Housing Fund along with representatives of diplomatic missions, the United Nations and civil society working in Iraq on durable solutions for internally displaced Iraqis.

To date, over 1.3 million Iraqis remain displaced from their homes inside Iraq and some 470,000 displaced Iraqis strive to survive as squatters in dilapidated public buildings or makeshift settlements.

Under the "Improving Access for IDPs and Returnees to Acceptable Shelter Solutions" project, an initiative implemented in partnership with the Ministry of Displacement and Migration, UN-HABITAT is tasked with preparing a strategy to support the Ministry's effort to develop long shelter solutions for people affected by displacement.

Planning workshop on assessments of HIV among prisoners

WHO Iraq, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health, the National AIDS Program and the WHO Collaborating Center for Capacity Building in HIV Surveillance at the Andrija Stampar School of Public Health (Croatia), successfully conducted a planning workshop for assessments of HIV among prisoners from 9 to 12 May, 2011 in Zagreb. A total of nine participants from the National AIDS Program, WHO Iraq and the WHO Collaborating Center participated in the workshop.

During the event, participants discussed the feasibility and requirements of conducting assessments of HIV among prisoners and developed required assessment protocols and tools. Moreover, a work plan with details of activities, responsible bodies and a timeline has been agreed for the implementation of the planned assessments.

Social Determinants of Health: Concepts and Tools to Promote Equity in Health in Iraq

WHO Iraq along with the Ministry of Health of Iraq conducted a three-day training workshop from 3-5 May 2011 on "Social Determinants of Health (SDH): Concepts and Tools to Promote Equity in Health in Iraq" in Amman, Jordan.

The event was designed to build on the fact that a health system in itself is a social determinant of health. The main objectives were to identify the challenges to the achievement of health equity in a conflict setting, and to propose a plan of action and to identify sustainable structures to address these issues.

During the workshop, the participants from different ministries and syndicates, including the Ministry of Health, Finance, Women Affairs, Defense, Labor and Social Affairs, Education, Head of the Medical Syndicate, Dental and Head of the Nursing Syndicate, were introduced and had the opportunity to engage in group work to identify and prioritize the social determinants of health.

At the end the event, a comprehensive plan of action entailing the formation of a national level steering committee, as well as a technical working group will be tasked to work on the strategy on how to tackle SDH in Iraq.

Computerized Maintenance Management System of Biomedical Equipment in Iraq

As follow up to the ongoing project of introducing a computerized maintenance management system (CMMS) in Iraq, the WHO held a seminar to discuss the progress and undertake issues with the implementation of Asset plus system from GE Healthcare, as well as guide the three concerned health departments of Erbil, Muthana and the Medical City/Baghdad on tackling current issues with the system.

Six Ministry of Health staff attended the 16-18 May 2011 seminar in Amman, Jordan, that was conducted by experts from GE. The CMMS is a modular system which will assist in managing all aspects of biomedical equipment-based assets found in the healthcare institutions and will serve as a tool for management, reporting, monitoring and compilation of statistics in existing hospitals' medical equipment status.

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List of UN Acronyms

There are 16 UN organisations, programmes, agencies and funds working in Iraq. They are the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), International Labour Organization (ILO), International Organization for Migration (IOM), UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), UN Development Programme (UNDP), UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), UN Population Fund (UNFPA), UN Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT), Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), UN Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA), UN Office for Project Services (UNOPS), World Food Programme (WFP) and World Health Organization (WHO).