

UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW – HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL
UNICEF INPUTS - IRAQ¹

Background Information on Iraq

1. Iraq covers a geographic area of 435,052km and is bordered by Iran to the east, Turkey to the north, Syria and Jordan to the West, and Saudi Arabia and Kuwait to the south. Iraq has an estimated population of 29.68 million people, over half of which are children and young people (15.17 million). Some four million Iraqis are estimated to be in displacement, two million as refugees and two million internally displaced, having fled their communities of origin between 2003-2007 due to extreme sectarian strife in the country. Administratively, Iraq is composed of 18 governorates each of which are divided into districts and sub districts. The Iraqi constitution has recognized the three northern Kurdistan governorates as a semi-autonomous region legally providing the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) with the scope to govern the region's affairs apart from the central government in Baghdad.
2. Iraq is a democratic republic that has a federally representative parliament with a multi-party system headed by a Prime Minister. The current Prime Minister, Nouri al-Maliki, assumed power in December 2005 following the first general election in Iraq after the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003. The country's next general election is scheduled in January 2010. Since assuming power the current Government of Iraq (GoI) has embarked on the transition from a unitary state to a parliamentary republic system. The government's national priorities, as outlined in the National Development Strategy (NDS), are to mobilize Iraq's resources for the country's development, build the government's capacity for good governance, provide a framework for aid harmonization and effectiveness, and sustainable social and economic development. The GoI has reviewed the NDS and is currently preparing the National Development Plan which will outline national priorities from 2010 to 2015, including social priorities that are critical to attain the MDGs and rights of children.
3. The current Constitution adopted in October 2005 defines several rights and freedoms and has multiple laws directly incorporated into it. It guarantees the rule of law, equality before the law, equal opportunity, privacy, judicial independence and so forth. The Constitution is currently under review providing an opportunity for the incorporation of the provisions of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) into the Constitution.
4. The Government of Iraq has signed and ratified most international human rights instruments and is making efforts to meet its treaty reporting obligations as required. With support from UNICEF and UNFPA, the Ministry of Human Rights (MoHR), which is mandated with the responsibility of ensuring that all treaty obligations are met, is in the process of preparing periodic reports on the CRC and the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).
5. Since 2004, the GoI has attempted to address the most egregious human rights violations and restore the Rule of Law. Some of the accomplishments over the past five years include: the ratification of the two Optional Protocols to the CRC; the establishment of the High Commission for Human Rights; the establishment of human rights offices in key ministries; and the introduction of election quotas for women representatives in the Council of Representatives and national legislatures. Today, in Iraq's parliament, women hold 75 seats or 27% of the total number of seats, well above that of other Arab countries. However, in spite of these accomplishments and the GoI's general commitment to human rights, serious

¹ The UPR submission is compiled from various reports on Iraq including the following: the National Report on the Status of Human Development in Iraq – 2008; the World Bank supported Iraq Household Social and Economic Survey -2008; the WFP supported Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Analysis -2007; the UNICEF supported Multiple Cluster Indicator Survey 2006; the UN assistance Strategy for Iraq 2008-2010; UNICEF Iraq – Mid Term Review Report 2008

shortcomings exist in: realizing women's and children's rights; the administration of justice; the rights of minorities; freedom of expression and movement; treatment of detainees, especially in pre-trial detention; the targeting of civilians, including children, by insurgents and armed groups; and the results of ongoing violence, including death threats, abductions and killings in many parts of Iraq. While the incidence of violence has declined significantly since the end of 2007 the challenge for the GoI in the immediate future is to maintain and improve the security situation as American Forces prepare to withdraw from the country by end-2011.

6. With the decline of oil prices the national budget is expected to move from a surplus of nearly US\$20 billion in 2008 to a deficit of around US\$7.2 billion in 2010, potentially reducing government expenditures on services critical to the survival and development of Iraqi children, thereby further compromising their rights. However, as oil production gradually increases, private-sector activity revives, and investment (including foreign) grows some forecasters expect GDP growth to stabilize at around 6.5% in 2010, which may not compromise spending on social services that are important to the well-being of children.
7. Iraq has all the attributes of a middle income country, including immense wealth in natural resources (i.e. oil), but continues to face serious post-conflict political, economic and social challenges. For Iraq to realize the conditions of its middle income status it needs to make major reconstruction and rehabilitation efforts, reform many of its outdated social policies, including in the education, health, and water and sanitation sectors, and improve the economic environment so that private investment grows and the private sector can flourish. The GoI estimates that the country requires up to US\$400 billion to improve infrastructure and basic facilities that are dilapidated and in ruin after decades of neglect due to war and sanctions.
8. Despite Iraq's oil riches, average per capita income is low compared to neighbouring countries. Unequal income distribution, as highlighted by the Gini coefficient, is manifest with vast differences between Iraq's wealthy and poor. The poorest 20% of Iraqis receive less than 7% of total Iraqi income, while the wealthiest 20% receive 44%, more than six times that of the poorest. Rates of deprivation show that poverty afflicts some 34% of people in the country, with people living in rural areas more than three times as likely to be poor than their urban counterparts - 65% as compared with 21%.
9. Iraq is currently not on target to achieve any of the MDGs. While some indicators, such as mortality rates and education enrolment rates, show some progress it is not sufficient to realize established targets. For several other indicators, notably poverty, income equality, and water and sanitation, progress is slow. The challenges for Iraq in meeting its targets are considerable, however, with macro policy reform and localized focus and efforts on pockets of acute child vulnerability, significant progress is still possible.

Situation of children and women: Overview

10. The conflict has negatively affected Iraqi society and has devastating effects on the well-being and development of its people. Over the last five years, tens of thousands of Iraqis have been killed and millions continue to suffer from the consequences of violence and insecurity, whether they have been orphaned, widowed, injured or traumatized. While 2008 and early 2009 saw Iraq's gradual shifting from humanitarian crisis into fragile transition in several parts of the country, many Iraqis continue to be affected by generalized violence and fear. Millions of children and women are vulnerable as they cope with a lack of adequate services and unmet needs from the effects of years of extreme violence and decades of continual conflict, deprivation, and neglect. While children are generally vulnerable, disparities in the acuteness of vulnerability vary across the country, being more exacerbated within and between governorates and districts and sub-districts than others, and the causes for them varying from one community to the next.

Health and Nutrition

11. The decline of health services in Iraq since the early 1990s has lowered average life expectancy at birth from 65 years in 1987 to 58.2 years in 2006. The Under-Five Mortality Rate (U5MR) currently stands at 41 per 1000 live births, almost three times that of Syria (14 per 1,000) and almost twice that of Jordan (25 per 1,000). Iraq's high maternal mortality ratio (MMR), 84 per 100,000 live births, along with high infant mortality (IMR), 35 per 1000 live births, places it in the group of 68 countries globally which accounts for 97 per cent of maternal and child deaths worldwide. Significant progress in attaining the MDG targets of halving the IMR to 17/1000 live births, the U5MR to 21/1000 live births and the MMR to 29/100,000 live births will be challenging, however, is possible with comprehensive efforts joining national policy reform efforts with specific governorate level investments focused on pockets of acute child health and nutrition vulnerability.
12. Although basic health and nutrition services have been generally sustained amidst the conflict of the last six years, some services critical to the health and survival of the population have deteriorated. The emergence of a cholera epidemic in August 2008 with 925 cases (11 deaths) across 12 governorates underscores the poor state of water and sanitation infrastructure and service. Routine immunization services have also deteriorated over the last several years as violence has restricted vaccination teams from reaching the population and/or vice versa. In 2009, 29,674 cases of measles (about 200 have perished), nearly five times the number of cases than all of 2008 (over 6,000 cases) and over 100 times the number of cases than 2007 (230 cases) have been registered. This exponential increase is a result of the increasing low immunity of the population from reduced coverage of routine vaccinations.
13. The stunting of physical and mental growth due to chronic malnutrition is also predominant with around one in five under-five children affected. Of greater concern is that acute malnutrition, where children's chances for survival is reduced, is above the emergency health threshold of 5% in 38 districts (out of 114) compromising the survival of thousands of children. Furthermore, risk of malnutrition is compounded by high rates of Low Birth Weight (14% of all newborns), inadequate infant and young child feeding practices (25% exclusive breastfeeding rate), and micronutrient deficiencies (28% of households using adequately iodized salt).
14. HIV prevalence in Iraq is currently low, however, this is tenuous due to rapidly changing social dynamics such as the erosion of traditional values and practices, economic hardship, and increasing numbers of young people not completing secondary schooling, among others.

Education

15. Current primary school enrolment is 87% signifying that with policy reform and targeted investments *MDG 2: Achieving Universal Primary Education* can be attained. However, vast regional disparities exist with large percentages of children in areas across all governorates not going to primary school (i.e. less than 30% in areas is Nineveh, Kirkuk and Baghdad governorates).
16. Children have been unable to attend school due to insecurity-related school closures/disruptions, displacement, overcrowded classrooms, poverty, poor school infrastructure, and negative attitudes towards girl education. In many governorates over 30 per cent of primary schools are double or triple shifting - operating in the morning, afternoon and evening - to provide classes to a surplus of students, which is stretching the capacity of many schools and compromising the quality of learning.
17. Equally critical to access to schools is to achieve quality education, particularly to increase the standard of the teaching provided in schools. Presently, the teaching force in Iraq requires substantial upgrading of skills to meet the needs of children, which is particularly important in a post-conflict context. Teaching methodologies and school management are outmoded and

outdated, exacerbated by the exodus of many professional teaching staff during the height of the conflict.

Protection

18. Ongoing insecurity continues to force Iraqi children to grow up in an environment of extreme violence and fear. Continual violence has destroyed institutions and systems of physical, social and legal protection in most parts of the country. Children live in fear of violence, or have been witness to acts of extreme violence that may have taken lives of a known person. Even in situations where children have escaped direct violence, they have been exposed to psychosocial stress passed on by the caregivers and adults around them. More than 35.5 percent of adults suffer from impact of psychosocial stress, which is not conducive to creating a healthy living environment for children. Data from MICS 2006 reveals that 5.9 percent of children and young people have lost one or both parents. The loss of tens of thousands of parents and caregivers from conflict has forced thousands of children and young people to cope without the emotional and financial support of an adult, making them even more vulnerable to harassment, exploitation, and abuse.
19. The situation is also one of concern for the 368 children and adolescents currently held in detention centres in very poor conditions and for undetermined periods of time. Another 555 children and young people are being held in reformatories that have little or no rehabilitation and reintegration programmes. In addition, around 1.6 million people are estimated to have their lives affected by more than 50 million cluster bomblets and 20 million land mines, which have killed or maimed around 8,000 people, including 2,000 children. There are also reports of increasing recruitment and use of children by armed groups in the country with the UN SG in 2009, for the first time, declaring Iraq as a country where children are being used by armed groups. Reports indicate children are being used as scouts, lookouts, and spies, to man checkpoints, to transport explosives and equipment, to plant explosive devices such as roadside bombs, and as suicide bombers. While not confirmed, some reports have indicated that high levels of poverty and hardship along with liberalized trade relations may be drawing Iraq into global trafficking networks.
20. The situation for women in Iraq has become increasingly difficult; a by-product of instability, impunity, increasing conservatism and the breakdown of traditional coping mechanisms. The 2006-7 IFHS revealed high levels of domestic violence, with 21.2 per cent of women reporting physical violence, 33.4 per cent of women reporting emotional violence, and 83.1 per cent of women reporting 'controlling behaviour' by their husbands. Of growing concern is the re-emergence of forms of gender-based violence (GBV) in many locations in Baghdad, Basra and Diyala, as well as in the Kurdistan Region such as honour crimes and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM).

Water and Sanitation

21. The Government of Iraq estimates overall access to safe water is at 72.5 per cent and sewage at 26 per cent, however, the situation is even more concerning as these services are generally unreliable, hampered by lack of maintenance from chronic under-investment, illegal water tapping, acts of sabotage, and frequent and prolonged power shortages. For example, 48 per cent of users have reported problems with water supply and 26 per cent of users reported problems with sanitation services (2006 MICS3).
22. Poor water quality also continues to be an issue. In the Basra governorate for example, 98 per cent of the population relies on Reverse Osmosis treated water because local supply is too salty for human consumption. Also, throughout the country only 17 per cent of all sewage is treated with estimates indicating that the amount of untreated sewage that drains into the Tigris River every day from Baghdad city alone could fill 370 Olympic size swimming pools. Solid waste management continues to be low with only 45 per cent of garbage, refuse, and other discarded materials collected.

23. Iraq is mostly dependent on river water for domestic, agricultural and industrial use with 95% of the country's water coming from the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, however, in spite of recent concessions by neighbouring countries, there is currently no water sharing pact with them where reports indicate that their construction of dams is contributing to reduced water levels in shared rivers in Iraq. The absence of a regionally integrated water resource management plan in Iraq will have a long lasting impact on the availability of safe water in the country affecting the health and education of hundreds of thousands of children unless properly addressed in the future. Low rainfall in 2008/2009 has also caused severe water shortages across northern Iraq and Iraq is currently experiencing one of the worst droughts of the past ten years which is having a serious impact on local agricultural and food production, adding to overall food insecurity and the threat of child malnutrition.

UNICEF's Response and Capacity Development Efforts

24. UNICEF works across Iraq to provide children with the essentials of a quality education, from school books and pens to Child-Friendly classrooms and well-trained teachers using child friendly teaching methodologies. UNICEF has rehabilitated hundreds of schools in Iraq, including installation of safe drinking water and separate toilets for girls who might otherwise be unable to attend. With government increasingly taking responsibility for infrastructure, UNICEF is starting to focus on supporting the Ministry to reform its education policy to promote child friendly schools – ensuring children are in a protective school environment – and improve the quality of education. Through partners, UNICEF is providing support to enhance the involvement and engagement in school management by the local school communities and parents.
25. UNICEF is supporting the GoI to protect children's right to survive and enjoy a healthy childhood, investing over \$60 million in basic health services since 2003. UNICEF's programmes are supporting mass immunization drives against childhood diseases, boosting national nutrition campaigns to fortify staple food with vitamins and minerals, rebuilding Primary Health Centres and maternity wards damaged during the war and retraining Iraq's doctors and nurses to provide the highest standards of care. UNICEF also helps to educate Iraq's most vulnerable communities to improve child health at home, promote exclusive breastfeeding and teaching families to prevent and manage dangerous childhood illnesses. To support families in crisis, UNICEF provides lifesaving medicines and emergency kits as well as therapeutic feeding for critically malnourished children.
26. UNICEF programmes are helping to rebuild water and sewerage networks and equip schools with safe drinking water and toilets. At the community level, UNICEF teaches children basic hygiene skills and helps families learn to manage their water supplies more effectively. UNICEF is also the leading supplier of Oral Rehydration Salts (ORS) which can prevent death from diarrhoeal diseases.
27. UNICEF is supporting the rebuilding of the protective environment for Iraq's most vulnerable children and women – both by helping Iraq's government improve national capacity and legal protections, and by providing safe havens for those most at risk of abuse and exploitation. Working through local partners, UNICEF programmes provide children with access to "child-friendly spaces", psycho-social support, family re-integration projects for children in institutions, strengthening the juvenile justice system and focusing on developing community-based alternatives to detention; extensive Mine Risk Education campaigns and prevention of gender based violence.
28. As the government moves towards more self-sufficiency and increases its capacity in social development as per its Constitutional commitments, UNICEF will support its efforts on 1) Protection of Child Rights, 2) attainment of Millennium Development Goals at decentralised levels, 3) Government Expenditure for Children / Fiscal Reforms, 4) Capacity Development, and 5) Policy and Systems Strengthening. In particular, UNICEF will focus on fiscal reform

and child-centred budgeting to ensure that fiscal planning is proportionate to the child population and that investments are made in areas of high child vulnerability. UNICEF is also actively participating in the preparation of the National Development Plan (2010 to 2015) to ensure that children come to the centre of the development agenda and the rights of all of Iraq's 15 million children are restored.