

IRAQ

SITUATION REPORT



UNITED NATIONS

30 August – 5 September 2004

OVERVIEW ►

The ceasefire agreement in Najaf appears to be holding, where the halt in hostilities has allowed for the return of displaced people, including some 2,000-3,000 people who fled to the north and east of Najaf and who were living in shrines and public buildings. The pace of return of some 25,000-50,000 IDPs from inside Najaf's city remains unknown, although significant damage to dwellings may hamper their rapid return. In Sadr City the Government is seeking to initiate a major reconstruction programme for which it has sought the support of the UN. Conflict continues in Sadr City, Falluja and Tel Afar with numerous Iraqi casualties.

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Baghdad The UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq, Mr. Ashraf Qazi, met with Mr. Annan in New York to brief on initial assessment of re-establishment of UNAMI in Baghdad.

Hostage Taking Denounced In a statement issued by the Secretary-General [31 August] Mr. Annan said he was appalled and dismayed by the gruesome murder of 12 Nepalese civilian hostages in Iraq. The Secretary-General was particularly disturbed by the cruel nature of these crimes and their use as public spectacle. Mr. Annan called for the immediate release of all hostages in Iraq and appeals to all parties to adhere strictly to the fundamental precepts of human rights and respect for human life. In addition to Mr. Annan's comments, the head of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) also issued an urgent plea [31 August] for the release of two French reporters held hostage in Iraq, vigorously condemning for the second time in a week the "shameful targeting" of journalists in the strife-torn country. "Such attacks will not contribute to the well-being of the people of Iraq. Such actions are contrary to the teaching of Islam," UNESCO Director-General Koïchiro Matsuura said. Earlier this week, Mr. Koïchiro Matsuura had condemned the murder of an Italian, and a Bangladeshi reporter.

HUMANITARIAN ►

Meetings held with the President, Prime Minister and other senior Government officials enabled the Acting SRSG (A/SRSG) Mr. Yacoub El Hillo to explain the ongoing work being supported by the UN in the humanitarian and reconstruction fields. All emphasised the importance of such involvement including for promoting stability. Discussions were also held with Ministers of Planning and Development Cooperation, Municipalities and Public Works, Environment, Labour and Social Affairs, Migration and Displacement and Women's Affairs. Consultations were also held with the US Iraq Reconstruction Management Office (IRMO), USAID, and DFID as well as NGOs (MSF, Première Urgence, NCCI, and some local women's organisations). Major interest was expressed by virtually all interlocutors in the UN assisting ministries with capacity building and the secondment of qualified Iraqis.

Iraqi officials this week sought UN help in rehabilitating urban areas hard-hit by recent clashes, including Najaf and Baghdad's Sadr City. Iraq's Minister of Planning and Development, Mahdi al Hafez, relayed the request during a meeting in Baghdad with the Deputy UN Special Representative for Iraq, Mr. Ross Mountain. Mr. al Hafez voiced appreciation for the level of coordination between the UN and Iraq, noting that many rehabilitation projects - focusing on water, electricity, education and health - are already receiving financial support from the UN Development Group Trust Fund for Iraq.

Implementation issues related to the reconstruction and rehabilitation programmes were tackled in Baghdad this week by the A/SRSG and the UN Country Team Coordinator Mr. El Hillo. These included displacement issues likely to arise in Kirkuk and the effect of the transfer of \$3.3 billion from the \$18.3 billion of US funds earmarked for reconstruction/rehabilitation to security-related expenditures on the regeneration of Iraqi infrastructure. In Amman, planning has begun towards the Tokyo Donor's Conference through the IRFFI Facilitation Committee with the Iraqi Planning Minister and the new Japanese Chair of the Donor Group. The Planning Minister has also welcomed UN inputs, emphasising human development in the Government draft Strategic Development Plan. The EC also conducted an intensive review of UN activities under IRFFI in relation to plans for replenishment.

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UN ELECTORAL ASSISTANCE ►

The Chairman and members of the Independent Electoral Commission of Iraq, accompanied by Mr. Carlos Valenzuela of the UNAMI electoral team, visited the three Kurdish governorates from 29 August through 3 September to initiate preparations for elections to the Kurdish regional parliament and the governorates, which will be held in tandem with elections to the National Transitional Assembly in January 2005. All efforts are being made to ensure that elections are held on schedule. An important ingredient is the processing of the data base of the Public Distribution system held by the Ministry of Trade to extract a draft electoral register. Some confusion still exists regarding a linkage between holding a census and registration. The Iraqi electoral commissioners and experts are pointing out that any census has no relevance for the electoral registration process. The electoral time table is very tight, any slippage on the logistic, security or political front would set back preparations.

PROGRAMME ►

Health (Cluster 2)

Polio Eradication The Iraqi Ministry of Health (MoH) led the Polio National Immunization campaign [4 September 2004] with the support of World Health Organisation (WHO) and UN Children's Fund, UNICEF, with funding from the European Commission. In addition to the technical support in planning and preparing for the campaign, WHO is supporting the MoH by covering the cost of health workers, transportation, training, meetings, health education materials and independent monitoring. The Iraqi Red Crescent Society (IRCS) is conducting independent monitoring and evaluation of the campaign. In a related development, monitors have been hired to oversee UNICEF's Health and Nutrition activities in three northern governorates.

HPB Distribution Resumes Twenty-one containers of high protein biscuits (HPB) worth US\$500,000 were delivered by UNICEF and its partners to all governorates. This included resumption of deliveries to governorates in the lower south which had been suspended due to the recent military activities in Najaf. UNICEF also delivered drugs valued at US\$38,000 to Baghdad this week. Remaining shipments are expected in September/October.

Health Rehabilitation Programme for Iraq (HRPI) Under the aegis of the HRPI, International Organisation for Migration's (IOM) has initiated discussion with the Iraqi MoH to jointly identify future needs for upgrading the skills and enhancing the knowledge of Iraqi specialist physicians. Capacity building remains a core priority of the MoH. This week the HRPI team assisted in the return of one case, including an escort, from Syria back to Baghdad.

Infrastructure and Housing (Cluster 4)

Electricity Workshop An Electricity workshop will take place in Amman from 20-21 September 2004, the aim of which is to coordinate ongoing and future funded activities in the electricity sector in southern Iraq and to identify priority areas for which donor funding could be sought. Participants will include the Ministry of Electricity (Baghdad) as well as the regional electricity authorities.

Port Survey Completed The hydrological survey of the access channels to the Port of Um Qasr has been completed and the final report will be issued by 12 September 2004. A pre-bid meeting for the subsequent dredging project will be convened on September 15 in Kuwait. Dredging could commence within six weeks of the signing of the contract, and will be completed within the first half of 2005.

Agriculture, Water resources and Environment (Cluster 5)

Sustainable Returns The Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) participated in the IDP Working Group meetings and preparations to the IDP Training. In co-operation with the World Food Programme (WFP), UN Office for Project Services (UNOPS) and UN Development programme (UNDP), FAO prepared a presentation on the

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supporting self-reliance and sustainability of returns. The presentation builds on the broad experience of these agencies in northern Iraq, highlights the lessons learned and elaborates on the process of transformation from humanitarian assistance to the development activities.

Mine Action (Cluster 7)

Activity Update The first draft of 2005 Iraqi Mine Action Portfolio has been developed, and submitted to the Mine Action team in New York for inclusion in the global portfolio. The principle aim of the portfolio is to serve as a reference tool for donors, policymakers, advocates, national and international managers and programme staff. UNICEF has signed a project proposal with Handicap International (HI) for a mine risk education project in Baghdad and its surroundings. The project will start by the beginning of October 2004. Follow-up action points have been agreed with the National Mine Action Authority following a coordination meeting in Amman. The Mine Cluster is currently discussing the feasibility of holding an Information Day for the Iraqi Mine Action Programme.

Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons - IDPs (Cluster 8)

IDP Working Group The IDP working group is closely following developments in the centre and reporting to the emergency working group. Tensions are rising among the various ethnic groups and there has been an increase in the number of returnees to the area over recent weeks, encouraged by the local authorities who are offering land and money for Kurdish displaced to return before the census due in June. If tensions continue to rise there is potential for further displacement to occur from the region.

Iraq Property Claims Commission (IPCC) The UN refugee agency, UNHCR, in partnership with IRC has started a new project to monitor the IPCC process and assist the IPCC in developing a manual of relevant Iraqi laws pertaining to property restitution. Results of the monitoring will be fed back to the IPCC in order for the IPCC to evaluate where further strengthening of the process is required. Over the past months, UNHCR's staff in southern Iraq, translated several property-related research papers that were received from Basra Law School.

UNHCR and IOM continue to participate in regular teleconferences with the head of the IPCC in Baghdad to provide advice and support as requested. In line with this, regular weekly meetings have been held in Amman with Iraq women refugees to seek their views on ensuring access to the process for women, ensuring that the legal framework allows for a fair inclusion of women and to assist in further refining the out of country claims proposal and information campaign. IOM and UNHCR PI officers have been working closely on the development of a public awareness campaign for the IPCC in- and outside Iraq.

Voluntary Repatriation Meeting On 3 and 4 September a meeting was held between UNHCR representatives from Lebanon, Iran and Jordan, the Iraqi authorities and several non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working in northern Iraq, to take stock of UNHCR's facilitated return operations to Iraq. Over 13,000 Iraqi's have returned to Iraq from Iran, Saudi Arabia and Lebanon in UNHCR facilitated movements since July last year. The facilitated repatriations had been suspended in the south as a result of the volatile situation, while in the north authorities wanted first to take stock of the possibilities to actually return and reintegrate.

Projects in the South A total of 56% of the US\$7.1 million granted by the Iraqi Reconstruction Trust Fund managed for reconstruction and reintegration activities in southern Iraq, has so far been committed. A first donor report was submitted to the Trust Fund managers in mid-August 2004. Also in August, UNHCR signed a sub-agreement with DRC, bringing the total number of active sub-agreements in southern Iraq to nine. Many programme activities were hindered or suspended during August due to the difficult security situation. The activities which continued without problems were those planned in rural returnee-affected villages. UNHCR's implementing partner has nearly completed its plans to reinforce precarious dykes in the marshlands and complete footbridges to enable children to

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attend school. Another partner of UNHCR is in the meantime continuing construction of up to 500 traditional mud/reed houses in five returnee-affected communities in Meysin province.

Capacity Building/Support to MoDM UNHCR assisted MoDM to identify temporary premises in Basra. The lease was signed on 31 August 2004. UNHCR will support the premises rental through its implementing partner and IOM has indicated it will provide funding to furnish and equip the temporary premises.

Governance and Civil Society (Cluster 9)

The creation of a trusted and independent media is essential to democratisation in Iraq, acting as checks and balances across society and government. The quality of the emerging media does not as yet, qualify them as trusted sources of information and vehicles for debate. Thus training has been identified as crucial to help promote the development of a free, trusted, and independent media. With this in mind, an agreement was signed on 2 September 2004 between UNDP and Reuters Foundation for the training of journalists within the context of the upcoming elections. The project has three components: 1) Four training courses each lasting one week, will guide a total of up to 60 senior Iraqi journalists. The priority target group selected by Reuters Foundation will be senior and experienced Iraqi journalists capable of handling the complexities of public affairs reporting. The training, which will cover a broad spectrum of content, will take place in Arabic. The courses should start at the beginning of October. 2) A training website will serve as a basic news exchange, drawing on the contacts made during the courses. It will operate throughout the latter part of 2004 and into 2005 until one or two weeks following the elections. There would be potential for further development into a more sophisticated model if additional grants are obtained later. 3) The third separate component is the training in professional media skills for 15 young journalists (print and electronic). This will be organised and take place at the American University in Cairo. The journalists will be selected by UNDP - Reuters will take responsibility for contracting the University and organising the logistics. The training should start early October.

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