



UNAMI FOCUS

Voice of the Mission

News Bulletin

Issue No. 19

February 2008

The SRSG, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, Presents The Secretary General's Report to the Security Council

On January 21, 2008, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, Special Representative of the Secretary General to the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), was in New York to brief the UN Security Council on the security and political situation in Iraq. His report is consistent with the spirit of paragraph 6 of resolution 1770 (2007), which was adopted on 10 August 2007. It clearly indicates that the Secretary-General must report to the Council on the execution of UNAMI's responsibilities on a quarterly basis. In compliance with this resolution, this is the second report submitted since its adoption.

In his address, Mr. de Mistura emphasized security improvements and a significant reduction in violence. Although he noted there are many challenges that remain ahead, the top UN Envoy to Iraq applauded the progress made towards national reconciliation, particularly in political dialogue. He said "The political and security terrain remains undoubtedly complex, inextricably linked, and prima facie quite daunting." Only days before Mr. de Mistura departed from Baghdad, the Iraqi Parliament of Representatives approved the Accountability and Justice law, which replaces the De-Baathification Commission with a new process calling for re-instating former government members.

Mr. de Mistura also provided an update on the activities of the UN mission in Iraq, includ-

ing: work conducted in the political sphere; activities of constitutional and electoral support units; humanitarian, reconstruction and development assistance; and last, but not least, human rights activities.

In this open Security Council meeting, most state members stressed the need for inclusive political dialogue and engagement with Iraq's neighboring countries as a basis for converting recent political gains into long lasting stability. However, grave concern was also expressed over the continuing humanitarian crisis, including refugees in neighboring countries.



SRSG, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, during his address to the United Nations Security Council

INDEX:

The SRSG, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, Presents The Secretary General's Report to the Security Council 1

Mr. David Veness, the Under-Secretary-General for Safety and Security, Visits Iraq 2

Iraqi/WHO Family Health Survey 2006/07: Study Reveals Alarming Figures 2

UNAMI Focus Interviews the WHO Representative in Iraq, Dr. Naeema Al Gasseer 4

The Reconstruction of the Holy Askari Shrine of Samarra 5

Erbil Hosts a Forum on Electoral Education Campaign Project 6

The Top UN Envoy in a news briefing, later after his Security Council address, cited four positive aspects and two major concerns. On the positive side, he praised the improvements in security witnessed through seeing the streets of Baghdad. He said, "We move in the red zone, we go around in Iraq, and we have been noticing a substantial improvement". The second positive aspect, Mr. de Mistura cited, is the economic surge in light of the International Monetary Fund's figures of an expected 7% increase in GDP, in addition to producing 200,000 barrels per day, in 2008. He also emphasized the de-Baathification law in further promoting national reconciliation in the country. Lastly, he highlighted the UN role in Iraq. He said, "We have a strong mandate, we are in Erbil (in the North), Baghdad, Basra, we are currently having a mission in Kirkuk and we are seriously and actively involved in many areas we were not before."

As for the concerns, the Special Representative underlined the need to sustain the gains accomplished thus far by ensuring they are reflected on the wellbeing of the Iraqi people by providing them with improved social services and economic standards. The second concern deals with the race against time in 2008. "These 12 months need to be well utilized in order to proceed accordingly," he added.

In accordance with the expanded mandate of UNSCR 1770, member states supported UNAMI in general and the steps taken by the Special Representative, in particular.

Mr. David Veness, the Under-Secretary-General for Safety and Security, Visits Iraq



David Veness, USG, in his address to national staff members in Baghdad

By Randa Jamal

During his fourth mission to Baghdad, between the 4th and 8th of February, Mr. David Veness, the Under Secretary General for Safety and Security, held several meetings with top Iraqi officials in Baghdad and Erbil and also visited Basra. The purpose of his mission was to observe and assess the current situation in Iraq to enable the UN, its agencies, funds and programmes to ensure the implementation of their respective mandate in light of UNSC 1770. Additionally, it included directing an inter-agency strategic review on the findings of a January 2007 survey conducted by the Departments of Peacekeeping Operations, Political Affairs and Safety and Security.

In a special address to national Iraqi staff members in Baghdad, on 7th of February, Mr. Veness confirmed the United Nation's commitment to improving their economic living standards through employment entitlements and benefits. Meanwhile, he recognized the challenges of safety and security the local staff members face on daily

basis. Mr. Veness commended them for the extraordinary work they do for the United Nations Assistance Mission, emphasizing that the mission would not be the same in stature and substance were it not for their effective role.

Iraqi/WHO Family Health Survey 2006/07: Study Reveals Alarming Figures

By Randa Jamal

The Iraq Family Health Survey (IFHS 2006-07), conducted by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Iraqi Ministry of Health, was officially launched in Baghdad on 10 January 2008, revealing data about health indicators. During the official launch, several speeches were delivered. MP, Dr. Nada Ibrahim represented the Speaker of Parliament, Dr. Mahmoud Al-Mashadani relayed the Parliament's greetings and the willingness of its members to collaborate in health sector reform. Additionally Minister of Health, Dr. Saleh Al Hasnawi offered welcoming remarks on behalf of Prime Minister, Nuri Al Maliki, and stressed the importance of scientific research in setting new health policies and strategies.

Remarks on behalf of Minister of Planning and Development, Dr. Ali Baban, were delivered by his Deputy Dr. Mahdi Al Alak, who emphasized the need for continuous collaboration with the Ministry of Health in conducting surveys and research for planning and monitoring development goals and setting health targets.

Dr. Bakhshan, the Kurdistan Representative spoke on behalf of Kurdistan Region Minister of Health, Dr. Abdul Rahman Younis. He stressed the importance of such studies in reflecting both national and regional specific indicators. Additional speakers included Dr. Naeema Al Gaseer, the WHO representative in Iraq and Mr. Ilkka Uusitalo, the Ambassador of the European Commission (EC). Dr. Mahdi Alak presented an overview of the IHFS, including the methodology used to conduct the survey, Dr. Ihsan Ahmad presented the results and recommendations, and the closing remarks were made by the Deputy Minister of Health Dr. Amar Al-Khauzai.

The survey was financed by the European Commission (EC), and during his speech, the European Ambassador reaffirmed the EC's support for the methodology employed to conduct the survey and for the development of the health sector in Iraq, including a revised health policy. He stressed that the basis for any guiding policies is good evidence based on data and he urged the media to focus on the figures related to health in Iraq.

Similarly, the Minister of Health emphasized the impor-

tance of the survey, which collected information about the population and health care needs so that the government can draw health policies that suit the health needs of the Iraqi population. Dr. Saleh Al-Hasnawi also said that the survey was scientifically sound and that it indicated a massive death toll since the beginning of the conflict. He also stressed the importance for the government to have reliable data on violent deaths. He said, *"There is some controversy about the reports from the media. Some of the information that has been published may be used or misused for political reasons and so on"*.

Dr. Naeema Al Gaseer, the WHO Representative in Iraq, reaffirmed the organization's position on generating policies that guide and support programmes under government implementation. In order to achieve national health and development strategy in line with Millennium Development Goals, the WHO emphasizes effective partnership and credible co-sponsored studies. Dr. Naeema Al Gaseer also praised the efforts of the various contributors, especially the community member participants, the employees of the Ministry of Health and other Iraqi health workers, in

making IFHS a success. She said, *"They built up the trust of the community, especially in a difficult situation. They did risk their lives. There was a determination to make it a success and to generate hope"*.

Nonetheless, during the preparatory work leading to the findings, one Iraqi Health professional, Dr. Wafiq Abdul Jalil lost his life after a training held on IFHS in DIALYA. His death affected the entire team. Another key Iraqi senior scientist, Deputy Director of the Ministry of Planning, Dr. Luay Hakki who was working on the survey until it was nearly completed, was shot dead on the 2nd of August 2007 on his way to work in Baghdad.

The IFHS was conducted to update and expand the Iraqi national health database through health indicators, such as women's morbidity and mortality; measures of disparities in health; and expenditure between different strata of the population (e.g. regional and national). The survey was designed by a group of national and international experts comprised of demographers, epidemiologists and health professionals from participating Iraqi ministries. This survey covered the South, Center and North. Earlier, in August and September of 2006, Central and Southern Governorates were covered and in February and March of 2007, the Kurdistan region was covered.

The survey interviewed approximately 9,345 people, based on a random sample of households throughout the country, in nearly 1,000 neighborhoods and villages.



IHFS Launch

The households were selected according to statistical methods that are standard in peaceful areas. The findings of the survey estimated that 151,000 Iraqis have been killed from the start of the war until June 2006. In addition, WHO indicated that with a 95 % degree of statistical certainty, between 104,000 and 223,000 civilians could have died. Therefore the study reveals that the number of violent deaths between March 2003 and June 2006 could vary from 104,000 to 223,000.

The WHO statistician, Mohamed Ali, who provided technical assistance for the survey, explained that “assessment of the death toll in conflict situations is extremely difficult and household survey results have to be interpreted with caution”, adding that “in the absence of comprehensive death registration and hospital reporting, household surveys are the best we can do”.

These figures are part of a larger study that includes data on chronic illnesses, environmental risk factors, mental health status, smoking habits, sexually transmitted infections, and domestic violence, along with other aspects that affect family household health in Iraq. For instance, one alarming figure is that only 57% of the women surveyed have heard of HIV/AIDS, in comparison to 84% of women in Turkey and Egypt, 91% in Morocco and 97% in Jordan. However, it needs to be noted that the HIV/AIDS prevalence in Iraq is considerably very low.

UNAMI Focus Interviews the WHO Representative in Iraq, Dr. Naeema Al Gasseer



Dr. Naeema Al-Gasseer, Who Representative in Iraq

On the occasion of launching the Iraqi Family Survey 2006-07 in January 2008, UNAMI conducted an interview with the WHO Representative in Iraq.

– Can you provide the UNAMI focus readers with a synopsis on WHO's objectives in Iraq, in general, and what you would like to achieve through survey studies, in particular?

Al Gasseer: The purpose of Iraq Family Health Survey was to update and expand the Iraqi national health data base and to provide a basis for the development of health and population policies and Programmes. It will assist the Iraqis to monitor health trends and track progress in meeting international development goals and standards. The World Health Organization (WHO), as stipulated in our mandate, monitors morbidity, mortality and other health indicators and WHO Iraq is transmitting their mandate. WHO is coordinating the UN/NGO Health and Nutrition Sector. Therefore the results of such

surveys and others will provide an opportunity to set health policies and strategies with the right services needed for the Iraqi people. Recently the Minister of Health, Dr. Saleh Al – Hasnawi signed, on behalf of the Government of Iraq (GoI), with Iraq's WHO Representative a Joint GoI/WHO Programme Plan for 2008/2009. The plan is to support the health priorities in Iraq. These priorities were identified in both the National Development Strategy and the International COMPACT for Iraq.

– The IHFS 2006/07 is a successful study given the amount of work put into it and the results it generated. In your opinion, what were the main ingredients for the success recipe?

Al Gasseer: There are many ingredients for the success of carrying out a large survey: partnership, transparency, trust, technical competence of experts at the various levels including the commitment and determination to succeed. From the start, the ability to work with one another including team building was the thrust of it all. Cooperation amongst the various stakeholders, including the Ministry of Health (MoH), Ministry of Planning (MoP) and WHO, along with two respective ministries in the Iraq Kurdistan Region and the support of European Union (EU) and its funding, was vital to its success.

Early on, during the preparation phase of the survey, the team lost one of its members, an Iraqi physician who lost his life due to violence.

The moral of the team was extremely low because of the loss of their colleague. Given these circumstances, it was raised whether we should withhold the study for few days/weeks or even months. However, and particularly with the determination of our Iraqi employees, we proceeded with working. We reached a stage that we collectively decided that “we can do it, let’s do it and let’s look forward”.

Success was also achieved through informing the communities about the survey and involving them early on in process; they were the gist of the survey. This process of the information sharing and gaining support for the survey was accomplished through the Ministry of Health and Planning by sending information and media alerts to the communities particularly the families surveyed. Corresponding with community district and neighborhoods leaders was also effective.

– Based on learned lessons, and if you were to conduct a similar study today, what are the aspects that you would reconsider, highlight and perhaps conduct differently?

Al Gasseer: We have many lessons learned based on the experiences of other UN agencies who conducted surveys earlier. Based on these lessons, we identified the number of interviewers, enhanced trainings and follow up, increasing the number of the teams. However, I would like to highlight that training and close supervision were imperative at the central and local levels. Another lesson learned pushed us in the direction of setting up daily operation rooms established in

Baghdad, Erbil and in Amman to follow all the interviews and the situation on the ground. There was a daily report compiled by the operation room in Amman and circulated to all the members involved. This daily progress report allowed the team to review the daily progress and figure out solutions to any arising problem.

Another lesson learned was to ensure that you involve in advance the local community members who fully supported the study in light of the difficult security situation. In certain situations, we had families protecting the health survey team members, showing a great deal of hospitality by allowing them to stay overnight and providing them with food. This kind of community engagement generated high response rates to the survey. Finally, the survey was carried out mainly by Iraqis, with Iraqis and for Iraqis, with the WHO’s technical support and with the EU’s funding.

– There are huge disparities between some of the figures cited in your study precisely on the number of violent deaths during the first three years since the fall of the former regime in March 2003, and others stated by the John Hopkins University, the British based Body Count and the Iraqi Government. How do you reconcile the various figures and what types of reactions did your figures generate?

Al Gasseer: Our estimate is that 151, 000 violent deaths occurred since the fall of the former regime between March 2003 to June 2006. The study by John Hopkins University and Baghdad’s Al-Mustansiriya University, pub-

lished in October 2006, estimated that 601, 027 Iraqis died of violent causes between March 2003 and June 2006. On the other hand, the Iraq Body Count is likely to underestimate violent deaths because a substantial number does not appear through media sources including its monitoring system. This survey focused on mortality only and involved 1,849 households in 47 clusters, whereas the IFHS study involved more than five times as many households and 20 times more clusters. Furthermore, this study provides the most reliable estimates up to date, because of its size, multiple ways of collecting information and quality control measures. Conducting more household surveys is not likely to offer any more clarity on the period studied. A comprehensive death registration system is the most accurate, and there is a great need to improve the system in Iraq.

The Reconstruction of the Holy Askari Shrine of Samarra

By Randa Jamal

It has been nearly two years since the bombing of the Holy Askari Shrine of Samarra, which devastated the entire country and took several thousands of Iraqi lives. In September 2007, nearly a year after this horrific episode, the Government of Iraq (GoI) invited a delegation from UNESCO (the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization) to visit Baghdad to follow-up on the restoration and reconstruction of the Al-Askari Shrine Project in Samarra.

The restoration of Al-Askari began on 5 February 2008, in Samarra, a city approximately 95 kilometers North of Baghdad. Iraqi and UN officials visited the site on the following day, to observe the first steps towards rebuilding the site, which is considered by Muslims in general and Shiites in particular to be a special holy site. When asked by the press about the reasons for delaying the rebuilding project, Mr. Mohammed Djelid, Head of the UNESCO Iraq Office, said “the situation is not easy. We know that there have been delays due to the security and preparations.” He added “It is not an ordinary building project.”

This entire reconstruction project is funded by the GoI and the European Commission. UNESCO has contractual arrangements with a Turkish company for the implementation of the first phase of the project. A day prior to visiting the site, the UNESCO representative met with the Iraqi Prime Minister, Nuri Al-Maliki, at his office in Baghdad. During this meeting, the PM announced his government’s allocation of funds towards the rebuilding process costs. Additionally, he said that the rebuilding of the Al-Askari Shrine “is a blow to those who want to fuel sectarian violence and drive Iraqi into a civil



The Reconstruction of the Holy Shrine in Samarra

war.” In turn, Mr. Djelid emphasized that Samarra is a symbol of national reconciliation and extended his appreciation to the GoI for their efforts in providing the security means and a tangible plan to ensure reconstruction and success. He also acknowledged that the Iraqi Government was financing the project and is “determined to transform Samarra into a city that deserves to be registered as an UNESCO World Heritage Site.”

The rebuilding of the Holy Al-Askari Shrine is considered, by all constituencies in Iraq and beyond—including the Iraqi Government, the donor community and the UN—a concrete step towards national reconciliation in the country in general and in promoting peace in Samarra in particular.

Erbil Hosts a Forum on Electoral Education Campaign Project

By Sabah Abdulrahman

In line with the Security Council Resolution 1770 (2007), the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) and the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) facilitated the launch of a forum for prominent representatives from the Iraqi civil society and the constitutionally-established Independent Higher Electoral Commission (IHEC) to mark the commencement of the Electoral Education Campaign Project and to discuss ways for streamlining the implementation of the National Electoral Education Plan, which will be funded by the Iraq Trust Fund. The KRG Minister for Civil Society Mr. George Mansour also attended the opening session on 8 February 2008 and delivered a speech underlining the importance of such an event in terms of awareness of the electoral process. With help of UNAMI and UNOPS experts acting as facilitators, 23 members representing the IHEC and an array of Iraqi civil society



Participants attending the forum on Electoral Education

organizations and academics engaged in 4 days of extensive discussion on a wide range of issues pertaining to electoral and voter education campaigns, including the endorsement of a bi-law for the Forum Coordination Committee and election of its members, as well as determining

the role and responsibilities of governmental and non-governmental partners, education methods, material to be used and oversight and coordination mechanisms. Audio-visual presentations and handouts were used during the discussions to help the

participants envisage the themes being discussed.

The UN team present at the forum played the role of facilitator yet some participants preferred if the UN would have presented drafts to save time spent on lengthy discussions on technical matters.

UNAMI Focus

Is an internal bulletin produced by the Public Information Office of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq. The opinions expressed in this bulletin do not necessarily reflect those of the United Nations.

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