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Events Marking International Women's Day in the Iraqi Capital, Baghdad



A Music Group Composed of Young Women Performing on 8 March 2009 (Photo/Ali Abdul-Jalil)

By Randa Jamal

To mark International Women's Day (IWD) in Iraq and praise the achievements of Iraqi women, several events were held in March. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, attended two events, including one hosted by the Foreign Minister, Mr. Hosheyar Zebari. This was held at the Foreign Ministry, where various speeches acknowledged the women working for the Foreign Ministry, on 10 March 2009. Another event, hosted by the Vice President, Mr. Tareq Al-Hashimi, was held at Al-Raheed Hotel in Baghdad, 8 March 2009, where a wide constituency of Iraqi women was acknowledged for achievements in economics, science, journalism, politics, art, law, and agriculture.

Mr. de Mistura compared Iraq with countries that have improved their economic and social standards by utilizing the capacities of women along with men and described the positive strides made toward improving the situation of women in Iraq. For instance, 85% of Iraqi women are now reaching higher education and finding opportunities to contribute to society. Accordingly, he acknowledged the contributions of women in the audience, the education they have attained and the positive roles they play in society. He also observed that despite some of the concerns expressed about the established quota for women in provisional elections, it was a good average, and women were now in a position to foreground

the interests of their communities.

However, the Special Representative also stressed the need for a census to quantify the number of women in Iraq, which is expected to be higher than that of men. He noted that the number of widows is estimated to be around 2 million and that although "57%-58% of population are women, not more than 17% of them are actually in the Iraqi labour force." He emphasized that this "is something that needs to be improved since human capital potential is not being utilized".

The Special Representative expressed hope that the UN will play a significant role in supporting women in Iraq, by providing

INDEX

| | |
|--|---|
| Events Marking International Women's Day in the Iraqi Capital, Baghdad _____ | 1 |
| International Women's Day and the Situation of Iraqi Women _____ | 2 |
| The First of its Kind: The Launch of the Iraq Mental Health Survey 2006/07 _____ | 2 |
| Interview with Ms. Sylvia Fletcher _____ | 4 |
| ASG Ms. Catherine Bragg visits Iraq _____ | 4 |
| Medal Parade Awarding First Fiji Infantry Regiment _____ | 5 |
| UN Staff Celebrate Nawroz in the UNAMI Erbil Office _____ | 6 |
| UN Agencies Active in Iraq _____ | 7 |



Audience Celebrating IWD at Al-Rasheed Hotel
(Photo/ Ali Abdul Jalil)

assistance to implement effective laws that guarantee proper pensions for widows, and to enforce the rule of law to protect women from violence. He suggested that one or two prosecutions would

send a strong public message that violent acts against women will not be tolerated, and will be punished.

In closing, Mr. de Mistura indicated the readiness of the UN to provide assistance in implementing a national strategy that would aim to protect the rights of Iraqi women in all walks of life.

On IWD the UN Assistance Mission to Iraq also issued a press statement that highlighted progress, but also provided a reminder of the dire issues that face Iraqi women, including violence, discrimination, and the large number of widows. ■

The First of its Kind: The Launch of the Iraq Mental Health Survey 2006/07



Press, UN and Iraqi Officials during Launch of IMHS 2006/07 (Photo/ Ali Abdul Jalil)

By Randa Jamal

The first in Iraqi modern History, the Iraq Mental Health Survey (IMHS 2006/07) surveyed 4332 Iraqis (2,180 males and 2,152 females) over eighteen years of age, representing the Iraqi household population, across the country's various governorates and social sectors. Field work was conducted in the South and the Center of the country from August to September 2006 for the duration of 6 weeks. As for Al-Anbar, the field work was conducted from October to November 2006 for the duration of 7 weeks. And last, but not least, the field work in the Kurdistan region started in February and ended in March of 2007 for the duration of 6 weeks. Launched on 7 March 2009, the study was conducted throughout by the Iraqi Ministries of Health and Planning in a joint effort with the World Health Organization (WHO).

The survey reveals that out of the 16.5% who suffered from a mental health disorder during their lifetime, only 2.2% were recipients of medical care. Alarmingly, anxiety and behavioral disorders are higher among women than men, who have a higher rate of substance abuse. Parliament Representative Member, Ms. Samira Al-Musawi, who chairs *The Women, Family and Childhood Committee* was not surprised by the higher occurrence of anxiety and behavioral disorders among women. She observed, "Women have lived through very difficult conditions, including having to carry the brunt of caring for the family, mak-

International Women's Day and the Situation of Iraqi Women

Although women worldwide have made strides in the past several decades towards their incorporation in governments, and their representation in several sectors, they still lag behind men in health, education, and employment. Women constitute more than 51% of the world population; however, they hold only 16% of parliamentary and congressional seats worldwide. Even in democratic or advanced states, women's representation remains low.

To recognize this marginalisation, and to celebrate the achievements and struggles towards equality of women worldwide, 8 March is designated as International Women's Day (IWD). This day has been observed since the early 1900s, a period of great turbulence, especially in the industrialized world. Since then, IWD has grown to become a global day of recognition and celebration and for many decades, the United Nations has held annual conferences to coordinate international efforts for women's rights and participation in social, political and economic processes.

Clearly, IWD is significant for all women of the world, especially those who suffer injustice, tyranny and conflict, such as the women of Iraq. For instance, approximately 30% of Iraqi women have experi-

enced violence, including honor killings. An *AlterNet* interview with Iraqi Professor Najde Ali, on the occasion of the sixth anniversary of the invasion, detailed this suffering. The professor explained, "**You have hundreds of thousands of widows. Iraq has become a nation of widows.**" She added that **in some areas of Iraq 70% of households are headed by women, who are forced to beg or are forced into prostitution; some survive on as little as \$100.**

According to both Najde Ali and Nicola Pratt, co-authors of "What Kind of Liberation? Women and the Occupation of Iraq", the situation of Iraqi women has significantly deteriorated due to a wide range of rapidly changing political, economic, and social conditions. Ali and Pratt note ironically "**Iraqi women were once at the forefront of the region with regards to women's education, labor force participation, and political activism**". For instance, women's organizations, such as the Iraqi Women's Union, have long tackled taboo issues such as prostitution, divorce, the workplace, child custody, and property rights. However, despite the activism of Iraqi women since the 1920 revolution against the British occupation, Western media have persistently failed to highlight the plight of women in Iraq.



Logo of IMHS 2006/07: designed by Ms. Ruba Hikmat, WHO

ing ends meet and raising children—at times completely on their own, especially since there is a high number of widows”.

On a more optimistic note, the prevalence of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) was 3.6% lower than expected of a war-ridden country and lower than for other countries such as UK, the US, and Brazil. The Iraq WHO Representative, Dr. Naima Al Gaseer attributed this lower rate to the widespread resilience possessed by Iraqis in handling trauma and in moving forward with their lives. However, a higher level of mental health symptoms was reported such as increased phobia and anxiety.

Mental health disorder rates in general could be much higher, but as the Health Minister, Dr. Saleh Al Hasnawi, pointed out “In Iraq there is a considerable stigma attached to having a mental illness”. Such stigma may prevent survey respondents from responding honestly. To address stigma, he added, “We must implement large-scale community education programmes to decrease this stigma and encourage people to come forward to seek the treatment they need”. He emphasized that improving mental health will be a top priority within the domain of health, considering the emotional distress many experience.

He also stressed the need for further research to better comprehend the coping strategies Iraqis use to deal with stress and conflict, but emphasized that it is most important “to achieve the stability that will allow all to live peacefully and without fear”.

In addition to prioritizing mental health services, the survey provides

insight about the prevalence of mental health disorders in various governorates and regions, across educational levels, social classes, urban and rural environments. This was an important accomplishment, because, as the Minister of Health of the Kurdistan region, Dr. Abdul Rahman Othman Younis, said, “It is important to customize mental health care to serve the needs of the different sectors of the population. The survey has been useful in pointing out these differences.”

Dr. Al Gaseer, attributed the success of the survey to three factors: 1) insight into the status of mental health in Iraq; 2) the ability to design health programmes for various targeted groups; and 3) the transfer of knowledge and skills to health professionals working on the ground in conducting such national surveys in Iraq.

However, a phenomenon that could impede addressing some of the challenges identified by the survey is the number of the social workers and psychiatrists in Iraq. For example, Dr. Abdul-Monaf Al-Jadiry, Professor and Chairman of Psychiatry at the University of Jordan, confirms that the survey report of 2006 estimates that the number of “mental health personnel in Iraq is 136 psychiatrists, 224 psychiatric nurses, 46 social worker and 31 psychologists”. Since 2006, the professor speculates there has been an increase of 40% in mental health personnel (a total of 612 health workers). How-

ever, Dr. Al Gaseer stressed that 40% is too high: WHO recommends assessing the number of health professionals and personnel delivering health services in the county.

However, for a population over 27 million, the number of health personnel seems insufficient to meet the mental health needs of an entire population. For example, the survey identified that 16.5% face a mental illness—that translates into millions of people who require mental health care.

Clearly, challenges lie ahead with much work needed to improve the country’s fragile infrastructure, especially since resources are minimal and the Government of Iraq has made severe cuts in its annual budget plans. Challenges include providing mental health services to children and adolescents now, to prevent the development of mental disorders into adulthood, and addressing the deeply rooted stigma of mental illness that prevails in several societies. Another challenge concerns the brain drain phenomenon that has had severe negative ramifications for Iraq and the need to persuade Iraqi professionals residing abroad to return to Iraq.

Yet, despite all that is unfolding in their country, Iraqis move forward with resilience and determination: this is imperative to the survival of a people who have experienced horrendous events and circumstances.■

- IMHS 2006/07 surveyed 4332 Iraqis over eighteen years of age, across the country’s various governorates and social sectors;
- Survey reveals that out of the 16.5% who suffered from a mental health disorder, only 2.2% were recipients of medical care;
- Anxiety and behavioral disorders are higher among women than men;
- Men have a higher rate of substance abuse;
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) was 3.6% lower than expected of a war-ridden country;
- The survey report of 2006 estimates that the number of mental health personnel in Iraq is 136 psychiatrists, 224 psychiatric nurses, 46 social worker and 31 psychologists covering a population of over 27 million

Interview with Ms. Sylvia Fletcher, Governance Team Leader, UNDP-Iraq

Combating Corruption in Iraq



Ms. Sylvia Fletcher, Governance Team Leader, UNDP-Iraq

Interview conducted by Randa Jamal

Why has UNDP chosen to focus on anti-corruption?

Anti-corruption is a key area of UNDP's development assistance programme because of its importance for accountability and efficiency of government. All three of the Government of Iraq framework documents: the National Development Strategy, the International Compact with Iraq and the National Security Strategy, highlight anti-corruption as a strategic issue.

The GOI became a signatory to the UN Convention Against Corruption in April 2008, and UNDP and the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) have undertaken a 5-year programme of assistance, centered on compliance with the UN-CAC. A rapid succession of events have marked Iraq's engagement with global and regional AC efforts, including Iraq joining the global Working Group on monitoring UN-CAC compliance in September 2008, participation in regional workshops on whistle-blower and witness protection, the request to join the Stolen Assets Recovery Initiative (STAR), and preparations for comprehensive AC assessments and to conduct a statistically relevant survey of perceptions of corruption.

Who are your main partners

within the government and civil society of Iraq?

Our main counterparts are the Joint Anti-Corruption Council, the Board of Supreme Audit, the Commission on Integrity, the Inspectors General and the Committee on Integrity of the Council of Representatives. We are fortunate that in all of these entities there is strong, visionary leadership.

What are the main methodologies that you utilize towards promoting the culture of anti-corruption and public awareness including building capacities and ensuring that reform comes from within rather from outside?

UNDP and UNODC have provided technical assistance to the specialized Iraqi AC entities for review of the legal framework and their on-going process of updating the laws governing the Board of Supreme Audit, the Commission on Integrity and Inspectors General. UNDP has provided extensive assistance to the Board of Supreme Audit for its capacity development, and for the relationship between the oversight functions of the Council of Representatives with the BSA. As one of the oldest, most respected institutions in Iraq, the 81-year old BSA is expected to play a key role in preventing corruption in local government, as the GOI's process of decentralized service delivery is implemented at the Governorate level. UN assistance is under way to all of the AC entities for their roles in promoting accountability and integrity at both the national, regional and governorate levels. We will support the involvement of citizen groups in developing a culture of integrity and accountability, as the implementation of these programmes advances. The national anti-corruption strategy is expected to be a comprehensive effort engaging all Iraqis, within

government, the private sector and throughout civil society.

Can you provide a synopsis on your background and the factors that brought you to Iraq to work on anti-corruption?

UNDP is fortunate to have developed a partnership with the UN's specialized AC agency, the UNODC. UNDP has expertise in governance and public administration and UNODC provides its expertise in law enforcement and prevention of fraud. We have a team comprised of lawyers and former prosecutors, Certified Public Accountants, economists, statisticians and political scientists. For my own part, I am an economist and political scientist and have worked for UNDP since 2002, in Sierra Leone, Somalia and now in Iraq. Before then, I worked on humanitarian and transition assistance for USAID in Africa; and prior to that I worked for the Government of Costa Rica as a macro economist and in the private sector for 25 years. ■

ASG Ms. Catherine Bragg visits Iraq



ASG Catherine Bragg meets with KRG Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani

By: Eli Smette & Sabah Abdulrahman

United Nations Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs/Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator (ASG/DERC), Ms. Catherine Bragg, conducted a five day mission to Iraq and Jordan from 7 to 12 February 2009. Ms Bragg's visit was first aimed at witnessing the operating environ-

ment for the UN, its partners and more particularly the Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). Her visit was also the occasion to work on the operationalization of OCHA's activities inside Iraq.

During her mission, the ASG met with partner Iraqi and international humanitarian NGOs and donors operating in Iraq, whom she thanked for their support to humanitarian and reconstruction efforts by the United Nations and the Iraqi government. Ms. Bragg also met with US officials, and reiterated the need for increased humanitarian space in Iraq to permit aid delivery by civilian entities.

When meeting with NGOs, the ASG encouraged their continued participation in aid delivery in Iraq. "International and national NGOs play a vital role in the delivery of humanitarian aid to affected populations in Iraq, both with stand-alone projects and as implementing partners of UN projects", said Ms Bragg.

She also highlighted the Expanded Humanitarian Response Fund (ERF), which has recently received a grant of 15 million USD from the Iraqi Trust Fund, as a funding opportunity for Iraqi and international NGOs. The ERF is intended to compliment other hu-



ASG Meets with a number of NGOs in Erbil

manitarian efforts in providing flexible and quick funding for urgent humanitarian response. Ms. Bragg encouraged NGOs to utilize this funding mechanism fully.

In Baghdad the ASG met with Iraqi Government officials, including the Iraqi Ministry of Displacement and Migration, and the Ministry of Human Rights. In Erbil, she met with the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) Prime Minister Mr. Nechirvan Barzani and with Dindar Zebari, the KRG Coordinator for UN Affairs for discussions on the humanitarian situation, including the situation of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and detainees and the impacts of the drought prevailing in the region.

"Thanks to the increasing relative stability in Iraq's south and center, the number of IDPs in the region was in the decline but there is still a need to assistance provision", the KRG Prime Minister told Ms. Bragg, adding that "the Iraqi Minister of Immigration and Immigrants was active and particularly supportive on this issue".

The situation of prisoners and detainees in Kurdistan Region was another topic ASG Bragg raised with the KRG Prime Minister who referred to the "notable achievements in this regard", while asserting that the main challenge was reforming the judiciary system and capacity building. "We are working on this front with the EU and would like the UN to provide us with technical assistance to undertake this with KRG funds", Barzani told Ms. Bragg.

During her stop in Amman, Ms. Bragg met with the Jordanian Minister of Foreign Affairs, and took the opportunity to thank the Government of Jordan for hosting UN agencies operating in Iraq, as well as for the continued support and hospitality offered to Iraqi refugees. ■

Medal Parade Awarding First Fiji Infantry Regiment



DSRSG David Shearer and the First Fiji Infantry Regiment

On 26 March 2009, all the 223 members of the First Battalion, Fiji Infantry Regiment (UNGU 9) were awarded the United Nations Special Service Medals, in recognition for their dedication, commitment, faithful and professional service to the United Nations.

"Given the circumstances which led to the establishment of UNAMI in 2004, UNGU and Fiji deserves this recognition for the professionalism and dignity it continues to display, reflecting the finest traditions of the Republic of Fiji's military forces in support of peace operations, and the true reflection of the United Nations soldiers", said the Deputy Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General (DSRSG), David Shearer in his address to the Battalion.

The United Nations Special Service Medal was created in 1995 to recognize military personnel and civilian police for their service, of at least 90 days, to the United Nations towards the endeavor of peace.



A wide shot of the Fiji Infantry Regiment Battalion

Since 1978, the First Battalion, Fiji Infantry Regiment has been participating in United Nations peacekeeping missions overseas. In 2002, the battalion was withdrawn from UNIFIL in Lebanon and an Element was deployed as part of the Regional Assistance Mission in Solomon Islands. Another Element was mobilized and deployed in Iraq (UNAMI) in 2004, as the United Nations Guard Unit.

The ceremony was presided by DSRSG David Shearer and attended by UNAMI staff as well as representatives of the international community in Baghdad.

The ceremony started off with a March on Parade, in addition to a reading of the history of the First Battalion, a reading of the Citation by UNAMI Chief of Staff, Mr. Siddarth Chatterjee, followed by the Medal Presentation, then a March Pass and the March in Review Order, and finally concluded by a speech, delivered by Mr. Shearer, and a Parade March Off. All guests were later invited to attend entertainment activities with UNGU personnel, which included sharing exquisite Fijian food, dances, songs and music. ■

UN Staff Celebrate Nawroz in the UNAMI Erbil Office

By: Sabah Abdulrahman

UN National staff members marked this year's Nawroz festival with bonfire, dance and music traditional costume in their compound for the third consecutive year.

Nawroz, literally meaning new day, is a traditional festival that marks the beginning of new Kurdish solar calendar years and climatic change from winter to spring on 21 March. It is celebrated across the region by many



Head of UNAMI-Erbil Office Mark Rutgers, Governor Nawzad Hadi and national Staff Member set the Symbolic Nawroz Fire

nations. According to deep-rooted legends, a tyrant named *Zuhak* had an illness that resulted in the growth of two serpents on his shoulders. To sooth his pain and the serpents, his doctors had prescribed application of human brain as an ointment on his shoulders every day.

This went on until *Kawa*, a blacksmith who could not contain his anger and the sorrow of loosing sons anymore, led a revolution and overthrew the tyrant on the first day of spring season. Fire was set atop of mountains the previous evening as a code to announce the start of the revolution, hence the continuation of bonfires tradition on the eve of Nawroz. For the Kurds in Iraq Nawroz has gained additional meanings in the recent years.



UN National staff Celebrating Nawroz in their Office

UN International UN staff from all agencies joined their national colleagues for the evening party and enjoyed hours of Kurdish dance and music. The governor of Erbil and his deputies, as well as the local protection forces and the Fijian contingent safeguarding the outer and inner rings of the compound accepted staff invitation and participated in the jubilations. The audience was given a synopsis of cultural and historical background of Nawroz after the symbolic fire was lit jointly the UNAMI Head of Office Mr. Mark Rutgers, Governor Nawzad Hadi and a national staff member. The Fijian troops also performed their traditional *Raude* Fan Dance in honor of Nawroz. The party lasted for hours.

A three-member committee of UNAMI national staff had coordinated all the preparatory efforts for the party with help from the Welfare Committee. ■

UN Agencies Active in Iraq March 2009

- The **Education** Sector Outcome Team, through UNICEF and UNESCO, hosted a meeting to further develop **Iraq's National Education Strategy**.
- UNICEF and UNESCO held a workshop on Enhancing the Learning Environment in Vulnerable Areas in Iraq. The Ministry of Education and other Iraqi officials attended.
- The **Governance** Sector Outcome Team, through UNDP and UNAMI Human Rights Office, offered two courses to Iraqi Ministries of Defense and Interior (MoI) in Erbil on international criminal, humanitarian and human-rights law.
- The **Water and Sanitation Sector Outcome Team**, through WHO, conducted a training on Sanitary Inspection of Water Resources for staff from water, health and environment directorates.
- Organised by the **Food and Agriculture Programme**, a workshop on the restoration of the Marshlands in Iraq was held in cooperation with the Iraqi Government. The Joint UN Marshlands Initiative will support the government to bring additional resources, strengthen services and build better governance systems in that vulnerable area.
- The **Protection Sector Outcome Team**, through UNFPA, held advocacy events in three Iraqi governorates to celebrate International Women's Day, where Iraqi ministries and directorates attended a documentary screening on conditions of Iraqi women.
- The **UN Country Team** for Iraq issued a joint press release on the occasion of International Women's Day on 8 March, calling for renewed commitment to promote women's rights in Iraq.
- The first **Iraq Mental Health Survey** (IMHS) was launched in Baghdad. The survey was undertaken by the Iraqi Ministries of Health and Planning and WHO.
- To strengthen the **Housing and Shelter Sector** Outcome Team, UN-HABITAT held its annual meeting to review the draft UN-HABITAT Country Programme Document for 2009–2011 and to prioritize actions and areas of operations in cooperation and consultation with the government.
- The **Health and Nutrition sector**, through WHO, supported a workshop on capacity building for compliance with International Health Regulations (IHR). The workshop reviewed current Iraqi health regulations and outlined a process to align them with international standards.
- The **Food Sector Outcome Team**, through WFP, met with partner line ministries in Baghdad where they agreed that WFP's current Emergency Operation for IDPs would be extended to the end of 2009 and would include other groups to maximise assistance to the most vulnerable.
- The Information and Analysis Unit issued the second series of the Iraqi Governorate profiles for Diyala, Kirkuk and Muthana. The governorate profiles included socio-economic information, maps, facts and figures on poverty, unemployment, health and education. All profiles along with other info products are available on www.iauiraq.org

* Information provided by the UNAMI Humanitarian, Reconstruction & Development Section

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