

Speech of Deputy Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General/

Resident Coordinator-Humanitarian Coordinator

Christine McNab

At the Opening Ceremony of

“The Iraqi Educational TV and the School Curricula Website”

Baghdad, 23 February 2011

Your Excellency Dr. Mohammad Ali Tameem, Minister of Education

Mr. Jobst von Kirchmann, Head of Cooperation at the European Union

Mr. Ghazi Mutlaq, Head of Curricula Directorate

Mr. Salem Nasrawi Head of Education TV

Distinguished guests and colleagues,

It is my great pleasure to be with you today to open the Iraq Education TV and launch the school curricula website.

The two projects we are launching today pioneer the making of tangible changes in the Iraq education system and they reflect the United Nations commitment to prioritise support to education in its work with the Government of Iraq.

Education is a fundamental human right, a right that all children and young people should enjoy for their personal development, and that all adults should continue to enjoy so that they can respond to changes in the socio-economic profile of their country.

Responding to the Millennium Development Goals, the Education for All goals and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Government of Iraq has committed to ensuring that, by 2015, all children in Iraq, in rural and urban areas, boys and girls alike, are able to complete a full course of primary schooling.

Improving access to, and quality of, education will have a number of positive outcomes:

- If we improve school enrolment and education levels among girls and women, we will assist Iraq to promote gender equality and empower more women and ensure that the next generation has a better start in life with parents, particularly mothers, who can help them with their schooling.
- If we increase literacy we will raise awareness and understanding of health issues, we will have fewer women dying during child birth, and more children surviving the first vulnerable months and years.
- If we improve education we have fewer girls marrying early, giving them a chance to flourish and learn even more before taking responsibility for bringing up children.
- If we improve education we will have more skilled young people who will be able to find a good job and make a difference and we will enable young people to use new technology.

In short, if we improve education, we improve the lives of millions: every boy, every girl, every man and every woman, every father and every mother: everyone in Iraq.

Education is essential and together we shall invest to improve not only access to education but also ensure that quality education is available at all levels.

The road ahead of us however is still long:

- One out of four people in Iraq lives in poverty, and fewer children go and complete primary school than they did in previous decades. This is partly due to poor learning environments with shift systems, over-crowded classrooms and poor infrastructure.
- With students not attending or dropping out of school, one in five Iraqis aged 15 years and above is illiterate and for every illiterate man there are two illiterate women.
- And school drop-outs can become victims to early and young labour whilst at the same time the official youth unemployment rate is around 30 percent.

But there is also some good news:

- A national education strategy is being developed to improve education policies and institutional capacity.
- Management information systems have been set up to monitor progress in education.
- Education staff are being trained in strategic planning and sector diagnosis.
- An education strategy to combat illiteracy is under-way.

- Alternative learning programmes have been set up.
- Classes are being rehabilitated and millions of textbooks are distributed to schools.

The United Nations through its Development Assistance Framework is committed to ensuring improved access to quality essential services and education is a key priority. Education projects carried out together with the Government will ensure that education is inclusive, participatory, academically effective, healthy and safe!

The two projects we are launching today, The Iraq Education TV and the Website on School Curricula, come at a crucial time and will play an important role in promoting education in Iraq.

The launch of the Iraq Education TV will target millions of Iraqis regardless of sect, religion, age or political affiliation and will promote the value of education and freedom of speech as two fundamental human rights.

And as technology is playing an increasingly key role in our daily lives especially among the youth in this region, the Iraqi Curriculum Website has great potential to make the Iraqi curriculum and learning materials accessible. School and literacy text books will be on-line and lessons in accelerated learning and information technology in addition to educational games will be available.

These two high-tech projects, and other projects that the United Nations implements in Iraq with its partners in the education sector, aim to make a difference to the learning environment of students, school teachers, university professors, school principals and everyone who believes in the power of education.

I would like to congratulate UNESCO, the Ministry of Education and the staff of these projects who spent months working for long hours to make these projects a reality. Thank you for the wonderful achievement and I wish you all best of success in the implementation of these projects.