



PRESS RELEASE **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**
On Global Action Week for Education the UN Calls for More Funds to Improve Access to Quality Public Education in Iraq

Baghdad – Amman, 20 April 2010, Marking the Education Global Action Week from 19-23 April which calls for “financing quality education as a right for all” the United Nations in Iraq says if the Education for All (EFA¹) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are to be met in the country, more public spending is needed and additional sources of funding must be channelled.

“If we are to achieve, or even to come close to the 2015 goals, it is urgent to inject more national and donor resources to education” said Director-General Irina Bokova of UNESCO, the lead UN agency on the EFA Goals. “Education for all is a continuum that starts at birth and goes throughout life, with learning taking place in both formal and non-formal settings.”

The 2010 Global EFA Monitoring Report² measures progress towards achieving the EFA Goals worldwide and shows that Iraq lags behind most countries in the region. As a result of decades of conflict and sanctions, quality and access to formal learning has decreased, negatively affecting enrollment at all levels of education. Primary school enrollment rates have dropped from 91% in 1990 to 85% in 2007. The deterioration of the education system has led to higher drop-out rates and illiteracy remains a concerning trend, with the current national literacy rates estimated at 80% for children aged 10 years old and over. Women are particularly affected by illiteracy, especially in rural areas. For instance available data indicates that amongst women aged 15 to 24 living in the rural areas close 50% are literate, compared with 72%-80% of women living in urban and metropolitan areas respectively.

“Iraq faces considerable challenges to improve access to education and guarantee that girls and boys have equal opportunities” said Christine McNab, the United Nations Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Iraq. “More financial resources are needed to ensure that the constitutional right to education, from early childhood care, to mainstream schooling, to literacy and life skills for youth and adults in Iraq, is met by the government. The coming years will be crucial in determining whether Iraq will be able to achieve the objectives envisaged in the six Education for All goals and the Millennium Development Goals” she added, echoing Ms. Bokova’s message.

The Government of Iraq is prioritizing education, increasing the budgetary allocation from 7.2% in 2008 to 9.9% in 2009 of total government expenditure³. However, considerable efforts are still needed to meet the 2015 target of 100% net primary enrolment ratio particularly in rural areas in accordance with the EFA and Millennium Development Goals⁴ aimed at achieving Universal Primary Education. Sustained investment in education will also be critical for attaining rest of the MDGs, as education can improve health, increase environmental sustainability and help eradicate poverty and hunger.

UNESCO is marking the Global Action Week for Education by organising a number of events throughout Iraq in partnership with the Ministry of Education. UNESCO Associated Schools (ASNet) and community learning centres in Iraq are participating in the world’s largest school lesson “1GOAL: Lesson for All”. UNESCO launched a public awareness campaign to highlight the importance of education has which included distribution of material on educational funding to literacy centres and schools and public service announcements in addition to a broadcast message from the Minister of Education on the UNESCO-supported Educational Television Channel throughout the week. WHO will celebrate the week through a series of health education activities organised in partnership with Ministry of Education.

“Of all the issues confronting Iraq’s children, the decline in children’s right to access quality learning has perhaps the most alarming implications for Iraq’s future, the next generation’s doctors, teachers, and leaders” stated UNICEF Representative to Iraq, Sikander Khan. “We look forward to further accelerating our efforts with the Government of Iraq, Iraqi communities, parents and children themselves to again make Iraq the education gold standard in the region, which, along with investments in children’s health and protection, will pay extraordinary dividends for a stable and prosperous Iraq in the future.”

The UN Education Sector Team in Iraq (UNESCO, UNICEF, UNHABITAT, WHO, ESCWA, ILO, UNOPS, IOM and WFP with other INGOs) has supported the education system in Iraq through various interventions. Harmonized coordination and collaboration has enabled remarkable achievements that target all educational levels: kindergartens (early childhood), primary, intermediate, secondary and higher education as well as technical and vocational education in addition to adult literacy through non-formal education activities. The geographic coverage of education projects and activities varies from national to governorate level; in some area-based projects, coverage was even tapered to district or school level.

The UN in Iraq will continue to work closely with relevant national stakeholders, including the Ministries of Education in Baghdad and Kurdistan Regional Government the Parliament, the Directorates of Education, civil society organizations, NGOs and local communities to address the factors affecting access to quality education in Iraq.

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EFA Goals site: <http://www.unesco.org/en/efa>

To download a fact sheet on education in Iraq please visit www.iauiraq.org

¹ For more information on EFA visit <http://www.unesco.org/en/efa>

² The EFA Global Monitoring Report 2010 *Reaching the marginalized* can be downloaded at <http://www.unesco.org/en/efareport/reports/2010-marginalization/>

³ UN Inter-Agency IAU, *Pre-CCA Analysis: Background Papers* (2009) www.iauiraq.org/reports/CCAWeekshop/CCA-Pre-AnalysisDraft.pdf

⁴ For more information on the MDGs in Iraq visit <http://www.iauiraq.org/mdgs.asp>