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## PRESS RELEASE

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### Government and civil society join forces to protect prisoners in Iraq

**Erbil, 23 February 2010** Civil society representatives and prison focal points under the Central Government and the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) this week completed a series of joint trainings aimed at improving the treatment of prisoners and detainees in Iraq.

The administration of justice and the criminal justice system in the country has for decades struggled to operate on par with international human rights standards. The trainings seek to build the capacity of government and civil society to enhance prison administration and rehabilitation services as well as to provide them with the opportunity to discuss the active role required from both parties to strengthen rights-based management of Iraqi prisons.

The initiative is part of a project implemented by the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) in cooperation with the Arab Institute for Human Rights and is funded by the European Union (EU) through the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

"In building the capacity of Iraqi prison administrators, we are initiating the first step towards a rights-based culture in detention facilities, ultimately preventing the violation of prisoners' rights," says the Director of UNOPS Iraq, Mr. Gerhard Pansegrouw.

"We will continue to support Iraq's efforts in protecting human rights and applying the rule of law. These joint efforts will contribute to increased stability", explains Jobst von Kirchmann, Head of Iraq Cooperation of the European Union Delegation.

The initiative started with two in-depth trainings for 26 participants on *International norms and instruments for the promotion and protection of detainees, prisoners and vulnerable people's rights*, and on *Prison management, the administration of justice and penal reforms*. A final course to improve the participants' training skills was then designed in collaboration with the Ministry of Human Rights (MoHR), enabling them to pass on their newly acquired knowledge to administrators and staff in eleven identified prisons in six governorates of Iraq.

Civil society members attending the workshops were from the Justice Network for Prisoners (JNP), a network of 29 national NGOs working to mainstream human rights into the management of penal institutions.

Even though the scope of this project is limited to the identified prisons, it is hoped that the increased capacity of the JNP members and the prison focal points will function as a foundation for future initiatives across all prisons in Iraq.

The umbrella project Programme for the Protection of Detainees and Torture Victims is funded by the European Union with a budget of 6,435,623 EURO (11,555,200,418 IQD).

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