



PRESS RELEASE

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The United Nations and Government of Iraq Join Forces to Restore the Marshlands of Iraq

Baghdad/ Amman – 12 March 2009: The United Nations and Iraqi government officials met this week to plan a major initiative to restore Iraq's marshlands region and improve the lives of its inhabitants. The event was jointly held with the Iraq State Minister of for the Marshlands and UN agencies. .

“The people living in the marshlands are some of the poorest and most badly provided with basic services,” said **David Shearer, The United Nations Deputy Special Representative for the Secretary-General/ Resident Coordinator for Iraq.** “Through this new initiative, the UN will work alongside Iraq's national and local government to help build back livelihoods and services and restore this unique environment” he added.

The Iraqi marshlands cover a 3,500 km sq area across the southern Iraqi governorates of Basra, Missan and Thi Qar. Those UN Agencies participating in the Marshlands Initiative include UNDP, FAO, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNHABITAT, UNESCO and WHO.

The Joint UN Marshlands Initiative will support the government to bring additional resources, strengthen services and build better governance systems. Developing the different aspects of the agriculture, the mainstay of the economy is a priority along with education, improved drinking water and better irrigation techniques.

The Marshlands have some of the worst development indicators in Iraq. 34% of the women in the Marshlands are illiterate compared with 24% at the national level and 81% of the households are not connected to the general water network compared with 26% at the national level.

The Ministry of Marshlands will co-finance many of these efforts and is already committing \$5 million to FAO for beginning a programme of sustainable agricultural development.

This effort will accelerate previous UN initiatives in the Marshlands both before and since 2003. Within the last five years, the UN has invested over \$30 million in projects in the region.

“The Marshlands of Iraq were harshly neglected over the years. The Government of Iraq is helping people to return to the abandoned areas of the Marshlands” said **His Excellency Al-Sari Hassan Radhi, Minister of State for the Marshlands.** “I welcome

the strengthened coordination between the UN and the Government that will eventually bring back life to this precious area of our country.”

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