



## PRESS RELEASE: UNDP proud to see independent Iraqi news agency nominated for prestigious award

**BAGHDAD, June 21 – The United Nations Development Programme said Sunday it was pleased to see one of its key projects in Iraq, the independent national news agency Aswat al-Iraq (Voices of Iraq) nominated for the prestigious One World Broadcasting Trust’s Special Award.**

“It is a tremendous honour for UNDP to support and be associated with such an important and great part of Iraq’s independent press. Aswat al-Iraq is key in our efforts to develop a broader freedom of expression and a strong democracy in Iraq,” Paolo Lembo, Country Director of UNDP-Iraq, said.

Aswat al-Iraq is the country’s first independent news agency, set up in 2004 and supported by UNDP through a donation from the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation, with capacity development provided by the Reuters Foundation.

“For the Spanish government, to help the often painful transition for a country from dictatorship to fully-fledged democracy with all the institutions this entails, is an important foreign-policy objective,” said José María Fernández López de Turiso of the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID.).

“Aswat al-Iraq is part of our support to Iraq on this front, and we are happy that this achievement has been honoured through a nomination to a prestigious international media award,” he added.

Aswat Al-Iraq covers political, business, sport, culture and civil society news in Iraq, is not affiliated to any political party and is recognized by its high professional standards of coverage. Three of the agency’s journalists have been killed during the course of their reporting, while many others were forced to cease work as journalists following intimidation and threats.

“Our day- to-day challenge is to be journalists in the most dangerous place, Iraq. How to survive and to produce balanced coverage in post-conflict divided society? How to use variety of reliable sources, reporting all sides of the story and reflecting Iraq with all its political, ethnic and religious diversity?” noted Zuhair al-Jezairy, Editor in Chief of Aswat al-Iraq, adding:

“After 35 years of state control on one-voice media, it was a hard challenge to build an independent press and a news agency like ours, but we have done it. Not the least thanks to our supporters, the Spanish government and UNDP.”

A panel debate on Aswat al-Iraq and how independent media can be strengthened in today's Iraq is scheduled to take place at the Foreign Press Association in London on Monday June 22, ahead of the One World Broadcasting Trust awards ceremony taking place in the evening of the same day.

Those interested in attending the panel debate should contact Ms. Alvhild Stromme ([alvhild.stromme@undp.org](mailto:alvhild.stromme@undp.org)) for further details. Journalists with press credentials are welcome to attend without registering first, as long as they identify themselves and register upon arrival.

UNDP has supported the development and progress of Iraq since 1976, and currently implements over 50 projects from five offices across the country. In 2008 UNDP delivered 88.7 million US dollars in development aid to Iraq, bringing the total for the five-year period from 2004 to 2008 period to over 451 million US dollars.

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**For media inquiries, please contact:**

Mr. Paal AARSAETHER  
Chief of Communications and External Relations  
UNDP-Iraq

E-mail: [paal.aarsaether@undp.org](mailto:paal.aarsaether@undp.org)  
Mobile: (+962) 79 7204 209