

\$10 million European Community Water and Sanitation project underway in Iraq; UNICEF relocates Country Office to Baghdad

BAGHDAD, 30 June 2009. A \$10 million project funded by the European Community to improve Iraq's water and sanitation services is underway. Implemented by UNICEF in collaboration with the Ministry of Municipalities and Public Works and the Ministry of Municipalities in Kurdistan, the project will increase the government's provision of services as well as strengthen their capacity to manage and develop Iraq's water and sanitation sector.

"This investment will provide over 100,000 people including children from 30 schools in Erbil, Sulaymaniyah, Muthanna, Thi-Qar, Missan, and Basra with improved access to water and sanitation facilities" stated Sikander Khan, UNICEF Iraq Representative. "The project also provides a critical support to the government's efforts to improve its overall delivery of water and sanitation services to millions more people. We aspire to enhance quality water and sanitation coverage to all Iraqi children and families, which will ensure the millennium development goal of reducing by half the number of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water by 2015 is attained."

Iraq's water and sanitation sector is currently unable to meet much of the population's needs.

After years of chronic under-investment and inadequate maintenance due to conflict and sanctions around six million people, 4.5 million of who live in rural communities, currently do not have access to safe drinking water. Of these, nearly 2.5 million people are accessing their water from a river or streams, putting them at very high risk of contracting water borne diseases such as acute watery diarrhea, the second largest killer of children in the country.

In the next year the project will train hundreds of government staff on best global water and sanitation practices, support the establishment of a water and sanitation Knowledge and Training Center, produce an up-to-date survey on the water and sanitation sector to identify the most critical areas in need of investment, and develop water and sanitation plans in two governorates that could be replicated in all governorates to ensure quality services are planned to reach the majority of the population.

Coinciding with the project's development, after six years of ensuring its operational response from Amman, Jordan due to conflict UNICEF Iraq is reinforcing its presence in Iraq with the arrival of five senior staff to Baghdad. This marks the beginning of the UNICEF Iraq country office's full transition back to Iraq over the next year.

"UNICEF has started relocating to Baghdad to strengthen its support to the government so that the long standing issues that have impinged children's rights are systematically resolved" stated Khan. "With children representing the most critical resource for Iraq's future stability and prosperity we must now, as reconstruction starts, ensure every effort and investment is made so their survival and development prospects improve. We look forward to developing and enhancing partnerships with all aspects of Iraqi society to bring the situation of Iraqi children on par with that of children in developed countries."

About UNICEF in Iraq

UNICEF has been on the ground in Iraq since 1983 working to ensure Iraqi children survive and realize their full potential. UNICEF is supporting the Government of Iraq to develop child-friendly policies, build the capacity of institutions, and mobilize resources to realize the full rights of Iraqi children. Via a network of staff and partners, UNICEF's programmes continue to improve basic health services, safeguard quality education, rebuild water and sanitation systems, protect children from abuse, violence and exploitation, and meet the needs of the most vulnerable in crisis situations.

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