

Press Release

Iraq Children's Peace Flag unveiled at meeting in Baghdad where agreement reached on strategic shifts to Government of Iraq and UNICEF's Programme of Cooperation

BAGHDAD – December 7, 2008. The Government of Iraq and UNICEF recently concluded a Mid-Term Review of their Programme of Cooperation (2007-2010) with government representatives, members of the international community, UN agencies, civil society and other key partners. The event was held on Wednesday 3 December at the Al-Rasheed Hotel and opened by the Iraq Minister for Foreign Affairs, His Excellency Mr. Hoshyar Zebari, with an address by the UN Special Representative for Iraq (SRSG), Mr Staffan de Mistura, followed by a brief ceremony to launch the Iraq Children's Peace Flag.

"We are very pleased with the result," said Mr Sikander Khan, UNICEF Representative for Iraq, "which validates overarching and specific shifts that will guide the remaining two years of the program cycle and which are imperative to delivering on our commitments to women and children given changes taking place within the country."

The review process has taken place in the wake of improvements in the security environment and economy, with government focusing on the delivery of social sector services, effectively enabling UNICEF to concentrate more on selective areas where it can add greater value and to increase its presence in Baghdad in 2009.

Major shifts include moving from a largely project management and supply focused approach to one of upstream policy support, institution building and multisectoral investment. UNICEF will however maintain a "first call for children" in emergencies by continuing to provide vital humanitarian assistance as and when required.

"Central to all our efforts is the need for more advocacy, promotion, and respect of children's rights using the principles and provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) which are inherent to the dignity and harmonious development of every child," said Mr Khan. "But we must do everything we can now to protect children from the extreme levels of violence they are living with on a daily basis in many parts of the country, as demonstrated several days ago in the callous targeting of a primary school in Mosul which killed and injured innocent civilians including school students," Mr Khan continued.

The Mid Term Review is a major milestone that takes place midway through UNICEF Country Programme cycles. It serves a dual purpose in that it evaluates performance and results attained while allowing adjustments to the programme focus in response to changes in the operational environment and changing priorities. UNICEF has a four year program of cooperation with the Government of Iraq from 2007 to 2010. The process for the mid-term review began early this year and has involved extensive participation and consultation with the government and other key partner agencies.

Launch of the Iraq Children's Peace Flag & Children's Appeal

The Iraq Children's Peace Flag was formally unveiled by HE Mr Zebari during the opening session of the Plenary Meeting, preceded by the presentation of the Children's Appeal by two Iraqi youth who were introduced by Ambassador Ilkka Uusitalo, Head of the European Commission Delegation to Iraq.

The attached Appeal, aimed at seniors and decision makers, asks for the fulfillment of children's rights.

The flag, measuring 5.5X3 meters made up of individual canvases painted by children from schools, orphanages and displaced camps throughout Iraq "are a powerful representation of their combined aspirations for their country," said Ambassador Uusitalo. "The paintings not only speak of loss – but of optimism and belief in the future." He expressed hope that the flag would serve as a platform to advocate for more support to Iraq and its children on its travels around the world.

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Background Note on the Peace Flag: Promoting Peace through Art

In July and August 2008, children from every governorate of Iraq, selected from schools, orphanages and IDP camps, came together to share their ideas of peace by painting their visions on canvas. The 18 individual canvases were eventually assembled to create the Iraqi Children's Peace Flag.

The Peace Flag initiative evolved out of UNICEF's Child Media project which was established to empower Iraqi children to capture their current realities and visions for the future through diaries, drawings, photography, creative writing and news reporting.

In June 2008 UNICEF's Iraq-based partners were trained to hold workshops for children to prepare them for the initiative and provide guidance and resources. UNICEF distributed canvases, paints and brushes to more than 200 talented Iraqi children (aged 8-15), chosen from all 18 governorates, who were asked to create their very own images of peace. The colorful pieces they made reflect their combined hopes and dreams of peace for their country.

This Peace Flag aims to focus world attention on children as the very fulcrum of peace building and recovery in Iraq as well as promoting national and international solidarity to meet children's needs and preserve their potential through supporting essential child services in education, primary health care, water, sanitation and protection.

In partnership with the European Commission (EC); one of the leading supporters of Iraq's recovery, UNICEF and its implementing NGO partners (INTERSOS, Mercy Corps, International Medical Corps and Relief International) have worked to support children across Iraq towards the creation of this vibrant peace flag.