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The Food Aid Organization of the United Nations

WFP News Release

12 November 2008

NEW REPORT SAYS IRAQ FOOD SECURITY BETTER BUT SITUATION STILL VOLATILE

BAGHDAD – The number of people without adequate access to food in Iraq has fallen dramatically, according to the findings of a joint assessment carried out by the Iraqi Government and the UN World Food Programme (WFP). The assessment – which shows a significant improvement in food security - found some 930,000 people were without adequate access to food last year, down from around four million in 2005.

The Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Assessment (CFSVA) was carried out in late 2007 in collaboration with the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Health Organization (WHO), as a follow-up to the last food security survey in mid-2005.

“We can give a cautious welcome to these figures,” said Edward Kallon, WFP Iraq Country Director. “I say cautious, because 930,000 is still far too many for a relatively wealthy country. Moreover, there are a further 6.4 million people who would slide into food insecurity if it were not for safety nets, such as the Public Distribution System (PDS).”

Under the Government-run PDS, every Iraqi is entitled to a monthly food basket to fulfill their nutritional needs. However, frequent shortfalls and delays in the distribution of certain commodities have made it difficult for vulnerable households to manage their monthly food needs.

As well as surveying the food security of 26,000 people across the country, the CFSVA also examined the nutritional status of 24,000 children under five. It found an improvement in national acute malnutrition rates and little change in chronic malnutrition rates. However, in five districts, stunting rates among children were described as alarming.

“This report gives us crucial insights into the current state of food security in Iraq,” said Dr Mehdi al-Alak, chairman of the Central Organization of Statistics and Information Technology of the Iraqi Ministry of Planning. “And that, in turn, is vital for the country’s economic recovery, reconstruction and improvements in basic services.”

“For the first time, we have a comprehensive report covering all parts of the country. This makes it an extremely valuable tool for working out policies and strategies in the future,” said Dr. Jamal Ameen, the head of Kurdistan Region Statistics Office.

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WFP is currently providing food assistance to 750,000 of the most vulnerable among the estimated 1.5 million people displaced inside Iraq since February 2006, who do not have continuous access to a PDS ration because they are unable to register in the places where they are currently living.

Kallon attributed the reversal of declining food security to increased economic activity across the country, stimulated by a marked improvement in security and the humanitarian efforts of the international community. “But the situation remains volatile and any deterioration could undermine the whole process,” he said.

The report recommends continued food assistance to the most vulnerable in collaboration with the Iraqi government’s efforts to reform the PDS. It calls for support to initiatives to improve mother and child nutrition and caring practices, scaling up micronutrient programmes and providing food for education in the poorest areas, with a particular emphasis on girls’ school enrolment and attendance.

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