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On World Water Day The UN Says Water Central to Recovery of Iraq

Baghdad- Amman - 22 March 2009: On World Water Day, United Nations Agencies highlighted the need for the people of Iraq to have access to safe water.

“Better management of Iraq’s water resources will improve quality of life for millions” said David Shearer the United Nations Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Iraq. “Water in Iraq is essential not just to life and health, but to agriculture, industry, electricity and jobs for Iraqi citizens” he added.

Only one in five families outside Baghdad has access to functioning sewage facilities. One-third of wastewater and sewage produced in Baghdad is treated, with much of the rest discharged as raw sewage into the Tigris and Euphrates rivers.

“Diarrhea as a result of contaminated water and poor hygiene is one of two main causes of death of children in Iraq” said Sikandar Khan, UNICEF Representative in Iraq, the agency leads the water and sanitation sector. In 2008, more than half a million cases of acute watery diarrhea were reported, including some cholera cases.

The United Nations is working in partnership with the Government of Iraq and other organisations on water projects nationwide, to repair water networks, promote water quality, support agricultural irrigation systems and conserve water during an extended drought.

The UN is also providing direct humanitarian assistance to those most at risk from water shortages in response to drought that now threatens the country’s livelihoods, especially agricultural produce. Annual rainfall has been less than 50% of the normal average in recent years.

In 2009, the Theme for World Water Day is "*Shared Water - Shared Opportunities*", with special focus on trans-boundary waters. The building of new dams and reservoirs in Iraq’s neighbouring countries may lead to a severe loss in the surface water which contributes to 76% of the Tigris and Euphrates' annual flow.

"Iraq and its neighbouring countries face many challenges in ensuring water resources are equitably shared. The success of this process will depend on cooperation, tolerance and mutual respect", said Mohamed Djelid, Director of UNESCO Iraq Office.

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