



PRESS RELEASE

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On World Water Day, the UN¹ Calls for Improved Access to Safe Water in Iraq

Baghdad, 18 March 2010: On this World Water Day, “Clean Water for a Healthy World”, the United Nations Agencies in Iraq highlight the right of the people in Iraq to have better access to safe water.

“The UN has identified water as a priority issue for action in the coming years in Iraq” said Christine McNab, the United Nations Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Iraq, adding that “As water is fundamental to all aspects of life: health and sanitation, agriculture, energy and employment, we must support the Government of Iraq’s work in ensuring the effective management of water resources, and in particular that all people in Iraq have access to clean water to improve their quality of life and well-being”.

As a result of decades of wars, violence, sanctions, underinvestment in infrastructure and poor management the delivery of safe water has been hindered. The Government of Iraq estimates that 24%, or nearly one in four Iraqis, do not have access to safe water. In rural areas, nearly half of the people are without safe drinking water with 26% using rivers and creeks to access their water. 5% use public taps. With millions of people still under-served, including a large number of internally displaced who reside in public building and tents lacking running water and sanitation facilities Iraq needs major progress if it is to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) target of 91% access to safe water by 2015. Meeting MDG targets on sanitation will also be a challenge. Only 17% of the sewage generated in Iraq being treated and the rest, 83%, being let out into rivers and waterways. Many water supplies are too salty for human consumption or agricultural use.

The pressures of a growing population, a changing climate, and dwindling water resources will further augment the challenge of delivering enough safe water to those who need it. Competition between agriculture, which already accounts for 90% of Iraq’s water consumption, industry and the delivery of basic services, will also increase.

The UN agencies in Iraq are launching the United Nations Development Assistance Framework, a joint initiative with the Government of Iraq for 2011-2014 with projects that will directly address, among other issues, the challenges arising from poor water quality and shortages. The UNDAF will draw from a variety of competencies of specialized agencies including UNICEF, WHO, UNESCO and FAO to support the government in expanding coverage of basic water and sanitation, water resource management and quality water and sanitation service provision.. Direct humanitarian assistance will continue to be provided to those most at risk from water shortages including in response to drought that threatens access to safe water and livelihoods, especially in rural areas.

“In collaboration with the Government of Iraq, the UN is supporting the rehabilitation of dozens of water stations, emergency provision of water to the most vulnerable families in drought affected areas, and communication campaigns on water use and conservation” said Sikander Khan, UNICEF Iraq Representative and lead of the UN’s water and sanitation response. “This combined with the development and implementation of a water preparedness and drought management strategy will ensure hundreds of thousands more Iraqis, including the vast majority of women and children, have access to safe drinking water thereby securing a healthy and prosperous future for Iraq” he added.

Together with the UN Assistance Mission to Iraq, UNAMI, the UN Country Team will continue to work with the Government and People of Iraq on all aspects of water management and the delivery of clean water to the people of Iraq.

¹ For a list of UN agencies working in Iraq please consult the FAQ on the UN in Iraq
<http://www.iauiraq.org/reports/FAQ-En.pdf>

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