



## Field Report, 5 May 2022

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سفرنا النظافة - المثنى

*These Field Reports are prepared by the field staff of UNAMI's Development Support Office (DSO), who are based in Iraq's governorates, where they coordinate with local government officials, NGOs, community groups, and other development actors. They also monitor socio-economic and development trends to improve the UN's understanding of events in Iraq.*

## 1. Baghdad – Ramadan and Ukraine: How Peace and War Affect the Local Economy



The blessed month of Ramadan<sup>1</sup> is ending, and while Iraqi markets seem full of food and other goods, there are fewer shoppers due to the high prices, and many hopes that the government will provide food baskets in conjunction with the holy month.

Most of what Iraqis consume in the holy month is rice, oil, sugar, flour, as well as eggs and all kinds of cheeses. Red and white meat are also essential items in preparing the Ramadan table for Iftar<sup>2</sup> and Suhoor<sup>3</sup>.

In response to rising global food prices caused by the Russian war on Ukraine, the government promised to distribute a double food basket within the ration card system<sup>4</sup> and disburse an emergency amount of 100,000 dinars (70 dollars) to vulnerable groups.

In this regard, locals in Baghdad say that most Iraqis fear a new rise in food prices with the approaching Eid holidays, adding, “We are used to high prices with the advent of the holy month of every year,” calling on the government to fulfill its promises it made weeks ago before the crisis worsens.

Sarmad Al-Asadi, a 38-year old owner of a small market in the capital, expressed his fears that the world is heading for a food crisis due to the ongoing war in Ukraine, the continuation of the Corona pandemic, water scarcity, and climate change.

He called on the authorities in Iraq to take practical measures to achieve food security by supporting the agricultural sector, helping farmers, and increasing agricultural areas throughout the country. He also urged the government in an interview with a local TV channel (Al Iraqiya) to support the private sector and factories that produce foodstuffs such as



Markets with no shoppers in Baghdad @Al-Jazeera net



Ramadan decorations didn't attract the buyers @RT

<sup>1</sup> The Ramadan fasting involves stopping eating, drinking and sexual intercourse from dawn to sunset. Practitioners can engage in all these acts once fasting is broken and restart fasting the next dawn. The cycle continues for a whole month. Ramadan fasting is one of the most observed of all the pillars of Islam, with 70-80% of Muslims practicing it. It is obligatory for all Muslims, men and women, from the age of puberty. Parents encourage their children to fast for half a day from the age of ten to condition them to fasting. Muslims have been practicing fasting in the lunar month of Ramadan for centuries.

<sup>2</sup> A meal taken by Muslims at sundown to break the daily fast during Ramadan

<sup>3</sup> Suhoor is an Islamic term referring to the pre-dawn meal consumed by Muslims before fasting in daylight hours during the Islamic month of Ramadan.

<sup>4</sup> The ration is a limited package of basic foodstuffs, distributed by the Iraqi Ministry of Trade on a monthly basis at a symbolic price to everyone living in Iraq. Distribution began in September 1990 to alleviate the consequences of the economic embargo imposed by the UN Security Council by Resolution No. 661 on August 6 1990 on Iraq as a result of the invasion of Kuwait. The PDS beneficiaries are about 39 million, and this system is the valve for food security in Iraq.



vegetable oils and canned goods because the temporary short-term solutions by the government have no vision and keep the fragile groups in society in constant need.

A spokesman for the Iraqi Ministry of Trade, Muhammad Hanoun, confirmed to Al-Arabya News Channel on March 16 that the Iraqi government has taken a number of measures to avoid and confront the crisis of rising prices by supporting the ration card and distributing two baskets in the holy month of Ramadan, indicating the possibility of providing a third basket.

Hanoun added that the government supports farmers by raising the price of wheat, as the government now buys a ton at 750,000 dinars (\$512) after it was at a price of 540,000 dinars (\$369). He says that the ministry is working to provide a strategic stockpile of 3 million tons of wheat and speed up support for rice contracts made by the private sector, in addition to facilitating government procedures for local marketing and import operations.

Hannoun indicated that there are accelerated measures to secure foodstuffs, especially oil and sugar. He added that work is underway to find a parallel line to support the government's approaches through the commercial market and pump large quantities of food baskets to beneficiaries.



*No one is interested in buying food items @IMN*

A local food wholesaler, Abdul Rahman Al-Gharawi, expects a new rise in food prices and says the reason is that the Ministry of Agriculture is delaying import licenses to traders, despite the fact that the Council of Ministers recognized the need to speed up the import of basic foodstuffs. He told IMN that the food crisis is a global crisis, and some families made the situation worse by stockpiling foodstuffs, fearing the prices will go higher.

Iraq does not suffer from a food crisis, according to economist Dr. Sadiq Al-Bahadli, but rather from a “crisis of political conscience,” especially in a country that has a budget of \$100 billion and whose financial income will increase after the rise in global oil prices due to Russia's war on Ukraine. A barrel of oil jumped from 60 to more than 110 dollars.

Al-Bahadli, a professor of economics at Al-Mustansiriya University, told the Iraqi Media Network (IMN) that Iraq has the two best social safety net systems in the world, represented by the ration quota and the social protection network. However vulnerable groups could be further protected from poverty by putting more cash into the system, cutting corruption, and providing grants.

He called for more import sources such as Canada and Australia to support the ration card. He also suggested that the government cooperate with Turkey by negotiating trade exchange in return for increasing water releases, or by working with Turkish companies to grow crops necessary for Iraq.



## 2. Muthanna – Youth Led Team for a Cleaner and Fairer Future



The impacts of climate change and environmental pollution on different sectors of society in Muthanna are evident and interrelated. The drought, heatwave, and dust storms harm food production, human health, and the ecosystem, and limit worker productivity.

With all these challenges, a team made up of one hundred young volunteers worked on many local initiatives to reduce the impact of environmental pollution. The Fighters Life Leaders Team's (FLLT) goals are maintaining a clean environment and raising awareness about the harmful effects of plastic and poor solid waste management.

Their initiatives include planting trees, road maintenance, decorating buildings, helping the poor, and providing support to the sick, especially cancer patients. The team's message carries love, hope, optimism and cooperation among young people to make change.

On 9 March, DSO met with Haider Johar, FLLT team leader. He explained that the young volunteers came together in 2017 and established a team of 100, aged from 17 to 35 years. The team's vision is to build peace and creativity among youth and cooperate to make Iraq better.

Rana Mohammad, age 21, said, "I used to be anti-social and was always quick to blush. My activities were limited to social media. After joining the FLLT team, I broke down these barriers and shared my thoughts with people that I met with for the first time.

Volunteering is a great way to meet new people. We all were inspired by our history and Mesopotamian civilization. There are numerous volunteer opportunities available. The key is finding a volunteer position that you would enjoy and are capable of doing."

The FLLT team worked on combating the phenomenon of desertification by increasing vegetation cover. They planted hundreds of trees in the city because of their multiple benefits on the environment and living organisms to restore ecological balance, moderate climate, and eliminate many pollutants.

The team of volunteers also organized three carnivals to send a message of peace, solidarity and support to cancer fighters. They also trained leaders in programs that included discussions about diversity to strengthen citizenship, entrepreneurship, human rights, psychological support, and the principles of media to support youth in Muthanna Governorate and improve public opinion.

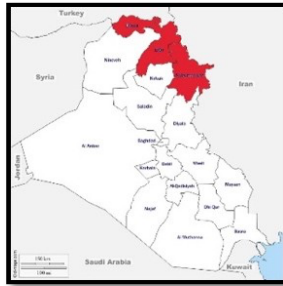


Rana prepares for the Carnival © FLLT website



River Cleaning Campaign © FLLT website

### 3. Kurdistan Region – Fuel Prices Continue to Rise



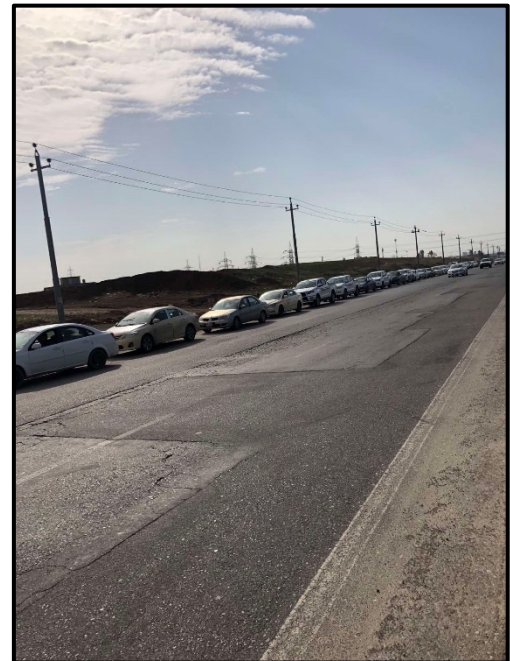
Petrol has hit 1,260 IQD (0.86 USD) per liter and diesel 875 IQD (0.60USD) per liter with future price rises expected. Costs have been rising all through last summer and reached a peak in February 2022. Many people are complaining, demanding government intervention on rising prices of consumer goods and fuel, but officials have deliberately decided not to comment on the situation.

February 2022 saw an average increase of 26 percent per liter compared to 2021. Long queues were seen across the Kurdistan region’s capital, Erbil, at government-subsidized fuel stations, which sell at lower prices.

“People are waiting two to three hours before they get to the pump. This is an unacceptable situation,” one of the pick-up drivers waiting in the queue told DSO.

“We are an oil-producing country. It is unthinkable that the cost of fuel is so expensive! This is very frustrating for people who have to work and have other responsibilities to spend most of their time queuing for fuel.”

In Kurdistan there is no public transportation system. There are no railways, metros, subway trains, or buses to compete with the expensive taxis. Most people depend on private transportation so they feel the impact of the price escalation at the pumps. The rise of fuel prices impacts not only transport, but also other sectors such as agriculture, construction, and electricity.



*Vehicles in long queues waiting for refueling*  
© DSO-KRI Team

Haji Ahmed, a fuel station owner, attributed the rise of fuel prices to the amount of oil supplied from Iran and Turkey, along with the global price increases of crude on international markets. He said that the situation is related to supply chain issues, especially the reduction of the amount Kurdistan receives from both neighboring countries. Many people now rely on locally produced fuel from KAR, the Biji government refinery.

The Iraqi government is pouring in one million liters of government-subsidized fuel to KRI daily. Haji Ahmed would like to see more. He said that the quantity received is not sufficient to cover local demand, and it is supplied to the stations, who in turn add on transportation fees and administration costs.



According to Ahmed, the fuel price in other Iraqi governorates outside KRG does not exceed 450 IQD/per liter (0.306 USD), but in KRI the selling price is 690 IQD/per liter (0.47 USD) for the government provided fuel.

The supply of this fuel is also limited, as only 20 fuel stations receive and sell the Iraqi government-subsidized fuel in Erbil Governorate. He said the scarcity of affordable fuel has led to racketeering, fuel smuggling from neighboring governorates, and black-market trading. Shortages of fuel are reported in neighboring Ninewa Governorate due to the influx of drivers from Kurdistan searching for cheaper gasoline.



Fuel station sells government-subsidized fuel in Erbil © DSO-KRI Team

On the flip side, most car users, especially civil servants, are using cars less often for their travels. This in return affects the pump owners. According to one of the owners of a non-subsidized station, his daily output has dropped from selling 20,000 liters a day to only 1,200 liters.

Subsidies were at the heart of Iraq's social safety net. Nothing has adequately replaced them. Years ago, there were public fuel stations in Kurdistan that sold government-subsidized fuel at a price of 450 IQD/per liter (0.306 USD) just like the rest of Iraq. Those fuel stations were closed and replaced by privately owned stations belonging to international and national oil companies and a few local businessmen. The disappearance of government-subsidized fuel and related companies gave way to local private refineries such as KAR, Shiwashok, Bazian, and tens of other small illegal refineries.

In a recently published oil report by Deloitte, Kurdistan produced 12 million barrels in 2021 compared to 15 million barrels in 2020. However, due to the price increase, Kurdistan got more oil revenue in 2021 (\$573,704,560) compared to 2020 (\$138,663,000).<sup>5</sup> The total increase is about 313 percent.

Unless the local authorities step in to subsidize the current prices or remove some tariffs, the prices will continue to rise. Unfortunately, the crackdown on illegal refineries and the black-market sellers by local government officials also affected the local oil market. The full control over fuel prices is now in the hands of pump operators and their distributors.



Fuel prices board of a fuel station in Erbil © DSO-KRI Team

<sup>5</sup> 17 March 2022 Kurdistan Deloitte published oil report.



## 4. Saladin – Water Scarcity Impacts Wheat Production



Thousands of kilometers of wheat farms in south Saladin province will not be producing seeds this season because of water irrigation scarcity in the Al Adhaim River.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, more than 15,000 km<sup>2</sup> of fertile land is used to supply the local markets with wheat and summer fruits like watermelon and other vegetable products.

The Al Adhaim River is the main irrigation source to make these lands green and productive, relying on rainwater storage in Al Adhaim Lake in Kirkuk province. The farmers tried to avoid the loss of their efforts and investments to grow wheat by raising the issue with the Water Resources Directorate in Saladin.

The directorate in turn demanded the Al Adhaim lake management to increase water releases in the river to irrigate these farms, yet the lake management refused to increase water supplies, as the water storage quantity is not sufficient for agricultural irrigation, and it would be only enough for irrigation of small villages and their animals dwelling alongside the river.

The Water Resources Directorate forecasted rainwater scarcity indicators in the winter and spring of 2021, instructing the farmers to avoid planting wheat and barley in the 2022 season for potential loss of the expenditures of planting wheat.

A group of local farmers, on behalf of the Director and the governor's assistant for agricultural affairs, met the Minister of Water Resources in Baghdad in January 2022 in an attempt to overcome water scarcity in the early months of the planting session.

Unfortunately, no increase in irrigation water supply releases occurred, as the minister himself told them that water storage is not enough for planting wheat this season, and the ministry already warned the farmers of failure in this planting season, instructing them not to risk their many efforts.

Therefore, the farmers will have no legal justification to be compensated for their farm losses. On the other hand, there were procedures that could be taken by the government to overcome this issue. First, fair distribution of water supply and use of the river through wise exploitation use of irrigation water by the farmers.

Secondly, removing the blockages constructed by the Bader militia (a Popular Mobilization Unit) to irrigate their farms located in east Samara and Dur districts along the river. The militia manages large wheat and barley farms and monopolizes water to their farms, which were established after 2015 during the operation to retake areas from ISIL. Removing the blockages would allow the water to be shared by other farmers.



*Farmer Jassim in his thirsty farm© UNAMI-DSO*

<sup>6</sup> The Adhaim is a river that originates in the Zagros Mountains in Sulaymaniyah Governorate and joins the Tigris river after 230 kilometers (140 mi), some 30 kilometers (19 mi) downstream (east-to-southeast) of Samarra.



The Badr militia farms use huge water pumps (12-inch pipes) that draw a large quantity of water from the shallow river and prevent other farmers in the northeast Dhuluyah sub-district to irrigate their farms this season. DSO conducted a field visit to these impacted areas and met some farmers who were upset and frustrated about their loss.

Jassim Mahdi, age 43, is one of the local farmers. He alleges that he spent more than \$17,000 on seeds, fertilizers, plowing, and fuel for the water pumps he installed on the riverbank.

“Time is out for our farms to grow properly and produce even if we get irrigation water now.” Not only have these farmers expended a lot of money on their farms, but they still have hope that the government may sympathize with them and compensate them for their losses.



*Al Adhim river drought stream in northeast of Dhuluyah sub-district ©UNAMI-DSO.*

## 5. North-Central Iraq – Women and the Environment



International Women’s Day is an official UN holiday that is celebrated every year on 8 March. It is a time to challenge gender norms, empower each other, break stereotypes, and celebrate diversity.

For Women’s Day in Kirkuk, UNAMI-DSO facilitated a presentation by the PENA Centre on Combating Violence Against Women. According to Director Awezan Nury Hakim, 89% of women in Iraq have suffered domestic abuse by a (usually male) family member. Over 23% were married under 17 years old.

The survey results from the PENA Center and the Swedish Women-to-Women Network do not match with the statistics from the Iraqi Ministry of the Interior. Director Hakim thinks that this is due to under-reporting by government, police, and the religious establishment.

Regrettably, the Anti-Domestic Violence Bill has been stuck in the Iraqi Parliament for years. There are also problems with enforcing existing laws. Most egregious were honor killings, child marriages before 15 years of age, and modifications in custody arrangements. According to Director Hakim, even parliamentarians violate the constitution by introducing a bill for girls to be married as young as 9 years in “urgent” cases.

On 9 March, DSO participated in a roundtable on women's roles in combating climate change. The participants discussed environmental degradation, chemical pollution, and the high prevalence of children with cancer in Kirkuk.



*A Round Table Discussion for International Women’s Day with the PENA Center, Government Officials, UNAMI, OHCHR, and UNFPA. © UNAMI*





In line with the theme for this year, “*Gender Equality Today for a Sustainable Tomorrow*,” DSO briefed on the two projects it did with UNEP on debris management and oil remediation. The participants recommended strengthening gender equality and countering the effects of climate change through raising awareness about the leadership role of women in the protection of the environment. They also recommended creating space and grant access for women to participate in decision-making processes on environmental policies.

Gender equality is key to a solution. More women must be included in the environmental departments and other relevant governmental agencies.

Participants highlighted climate change as a global issue that will affect everyone, but its consequences are shaped by widespread and persistent gender inequality. They stressed that climate change has more impacts on women and girls than men, particularly in vulnerable communities.

For example, in rural settings, women and girls are responsible for gathering food, water, and family energy resources. The girls are forced to leave school in order to help their mothers with extra burdens for the family. This results in greater workloads for women, indoor and outdoor occupational hazards, as well as psychological and emotional stress.

Several of the health professionals in the meeting underlined that women’s and girls’ health is endangered by climate change by limiting access to health care, as well as increasing risks related to maternal health, including breast cancer and higher mortality compared to men.

Participants further recommended enforcement of laws to hold polluters accountable, as the Iraqi domestic Law on the Environment does not provide adequate protection. Other recommendations of the roundtable sessions were to establish a regular discussion group aiming to identify practical solutions and provide a structural exchange platform between government representatives and civil society, increase green zones in Kirkuk through planting more trees and increasing parks, as well as organizing a conference on climate change with the oil and gas companies and a cement factory. These companies are part of the problem and the solution.

On 15 March, Resident Coordinator Irena Vojáčková-Sollorano, added via Facebook: “This is the time where we should all come together to work towards transformative climate action and to have a gender-inclusive and more equitable and sustainable world for us all. Building on the past week’s efforts, we will continue to join together to empower women and girls.”



*Participants concluding the Round Table Discussion to celebrate International Women’s Day in Kirkuk. © UNAMI*