

# FOR IRAQ

The United Nations in Iraq



الأمم المتحدة - العراق  
United Nations Iraq

2023



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**United Nations Iraq**

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“Iraqi children receiving UNMAS delivered Explosive Ordinance Risk Education, Tel Kaif, Ninewa, October 2023”

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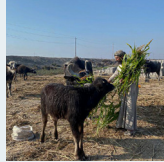
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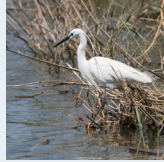


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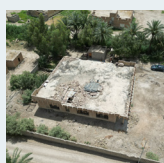
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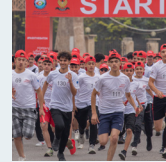
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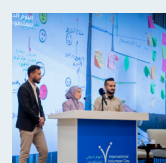
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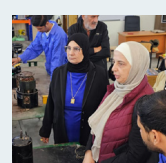
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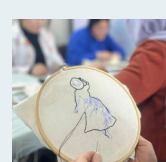
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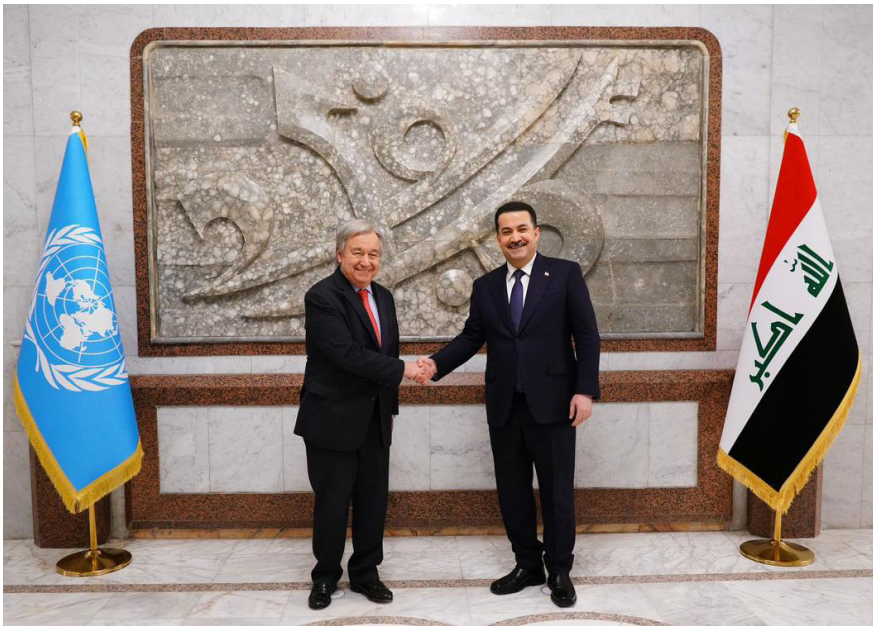
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# UN Iraq

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## Guterres stresses UN commitment to Iraq during first visit in 6 years

In March 2023, Secretary-General António Guterres visited Iraq for the first time in six years, expressing support for the country's people, the new Government and its ambitious reform agenda.

"I am here in a visit of solidarity to underscore the commitment of the United Nations to support Iraq in the consolidation of its democratic institutions and advancing peace, sustainable development and human rights for all Iraqis," Mr. Guterres told journalists in Baghdad.

After "decades of oppression, war, terrorism, sectarianism and foreign interference" in Iraq's affairs, Mr. Guterres acknowledged that the challenges the country faces could not be brushed aside and expressed his hope that Iraq "can

break cycles of instability and fragility". Mr. Guterres spoke of his "enormous admiration" for the Iraqi people, highlighting how he had witnessed the courage of those displaced inside the country several times, on previous visits.



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Mr. Guterres spoke of his "enormous admiration" for the Iraqi people, highlighting how he had witnessed the courage of those displaced inside the country several times, on previous visits.

The Secretary-General praised Iraq for repatriating its citizens from camps in northeast Syria. In a visit to the Jeddah rehabilitation center in Ninewa Governorate, he urged other governments "to take responsibility and to act". He added: "Iraq is demonstrating with enormous commitment that responsible repatriations are possible, by finding dignified solutions anchored in the principles of both accountability and reintegration. And it is working. I witnessed it today."

In Baghdad and Erbil, the Secretary-General met with leaders, and also heard from representatives from women's groups and youth. He also held a townhall meeting in Baghdad with UN personnel based in Iraq. Addressing a key challenge for Iraq, namely water scarcity, Mr. Guterres noted that the issue required international attention. The mighty Tigris and the Euphrates rivers were now running dry and the impact on agriculture has been dramatic, the Secretary-General said, adding that "it breaks my heart" to see farmers who have been forced to abandon lands where crops have been grown for thousands of years.

Iraq is one of the countries worst hit by climate change, which has driven displacement, threatened food security, destroyed livelihoods, fueled conflict and undermined human rights, he said. When coupled with a volatile security situation and governance challenges, "it can put stability at risk... so now is the time for the international community to support Iraq in tackling its environmental challenges, diversifying its economy, and harnessing its potential for sustainable growth," the Secretary-General stated.





**Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General for Iraq and Head of UNAMI**

## MS. JEANINE HENNIS-PLOSSCHAERT

### FOREWORD

The Iraq of 2023 looked very different from past years. The country is changing at a rapid pace, and has continued to evolve even more over the past year. While it is true that the road ahead will be laden with obstacles, I am hopeful that a brighter future will be unlocked for all Iraqis.

Clearly, the need for further and sustainable progress, for real reform and for better living standards will not decline. Hence, all of Iraq's leaders will need to continue working to put the

country on the clearest path to success, inclusive of all Iraqis - whatever their affiliation, background or ethnicity.

My time as the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) has, undeniably, entailed numerous challenges. But the complex beauty of Iraq, as well as the generosity and hospitality of its people, made the prospect of leaving at the end of my tenure a difficult one indeed. Let me be clear, the UN does not have a

magic wand and we do not pretend to have a solution for every ill - be it here in Iraq or anywhere else. At the end of the day, the balance between conflict and peace, poverty and prosperity hinges on the political will of the world's states. But if we can make a difference in the lives of people, it is worth stepping up and continuing to try.

I am confident that the UN Iraq family will remain a strong and reliable partner in supporting Iraqi aspirations for a prosperous and peaceful future.



The Canal Hotel 2003 bombing commemoration, August 2023

## The United Nations in Iraq

# Fast Facts

### Which UN organizations operate in Iraq?

The United Nations in Iraq comprises two field missions (UNAMI and UNITAD), UN Agencies, Funds and Programmes, working at the community, governorate and national levels across the Republic of Iraq.

## UNAMI

**T**he United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) is a special political mission established in 2003 by UN Security Council Resolution 1500, at the request of the Government of Iraq. Its role was greatly expanded in 2007 with the adoption of Resolution 1770.

UNAMI is headed by the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General (SRSG) for Iraq, who is supported by

two deputies. One Deputy SRSG oversees Political Affairs and Electoral Assistance, while a second Deputy SRSG oversees UN humanitarian and development efforts and also performs the functions of Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in Iraq.

Through its resolution 2682 (2023), adopted on 30 May 2023, the Security Council extended the mandate of UNAMI until 31 May 2024.

UNAMI has an authorized strength of 776 personnel (279 international, 495 national and 2 UNV).

The Mission's budget for 2023: USD 96.9 million.

The Mission is administered by the United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and supported by the Department of Peace Operations as well as the Department of Operational Support.

## UNAMI's mandate

### Resolution 2682 (2023)

Adopted by the Security Council at its 9331st meeting, on 30 May 2023

The Security Council,

Recalling all its previous relevant resolutions on Iraq, in particular 1500 (2003), 1546 (2004), 1557 (2004), 1619 (2005), 1700 (2006), 1770 (2007), 1830 (2008), 1883 (2009), 1936 (2010), 2001 (2011), 2061 (2012), 2110 (2013), 2169 (2014), 2233 (2015), 2299 (2016), 2379 (2017), 2421 (2018), 2470 (2019), 2522 (2020), 2576 (2021), 2631 (2022), and reiterating resolutions 2107 (2013) and 2621 (2022) on the situation between Iraq and Kuwait, and the values set forth in 2367 (2017),

Reaffirming the independence, sovereignty, unity, and territorial integrity of Iraq, and emphasizing the importance of the stability, prosperity, and security of Iraq for the people of Iraq, the region, and the international community, particularly in light of Iraq's territorial victory over ISIL (Da'esh), and encouraging the international community to continue supporting Iraq in this regard,

Supporting Iraq in addressing the challenges it faces as it continues its stabilization efforts, including the ongoing fight against terrorism and ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and their affiliates, consistent with its obligations under international law including international human rights law and international humanitarian law and continues the task of recovery, reconstruction, stabilization and reconciliation, including the requirement to meet the needs of all Iraqis, including women, youth, children, displaced persons, and persons belonging to ethnic and religious minorities, recognizing the threat of explosive ordinance and its impact on civilians, including children, and welcoming efforts to clear areas of such devices,

Welcoming the confirmation of Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed S. Al-Sudani's government by the Council of Representatives,

Encouraging the recently formed government to deliver on reforms, aimed at meeting the Iraqi people's legitimate aspirations,

to address corruption, respect and protect the human rights of all individuals in Iraq, promote accountability for human rights violations and abuses, deliver essential services, diversify the economy, create jobs, improve governance, combat climate change and environmental and water-related challenges, and strengthen viable and responsive state institutions, including the security sector,

Recognizing the Government of Iraq's efforts to that effect, and calling for State institutions to redouble efforts to pursue accountability for those responsible for human rights violations and abuses including the killing, serious injury, abduction or disappearance of demonstrators and journalists, including women and to safeguard and respect the rule of law and the right to freedom of expression,

Welcoming the Government of Iraq's efforts to assist internally displaced persons and displaced Iraqis in Syria to return and reintegrate to their areas of origin or resettle elsewhere in Iraq, encouraging again international support for those efforts, and stressing the importance of achieving dignified, safe and durable solutions undertaken on a voluntary and informed basis,

Recognizing the progress the Government of Iraq has made in implementing the Yazidi Survivors Law, establishing the General Directorate for Survivors Affairs and disbursing the first payments to survivors and victims, noting that the lack of inclusion of children born of conflict-related sexual violence needs to be addressed, including all administrative obstacles to obtain registration and documentation for these children, acknowledging the need to ensure a survivor-centered approach in which reparations and redress measures are continued, and evidentiary standards and requirements are not overly burdensome, discriminatory, or risk re-traumatizing and calling on the Government of Iraq to hold perpetrators of conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence accountable and provide mental health and psychosocial support to all survivors and victims,

Recognizing that the adverse effects of climate change, ecological changes, and natural disasters, among other factors, can contribute to desertification and drought, sand and dust storms, adversely impact food security, water scarcity, livelihoods, and the humanitarian situation, and aggravate any existing instability, emphasizing the need for comprehensive risk assessments by the Government of Iraq with the support of the United Nations, upon the request of the Government of Iraq, to take meaningful actions to adapt to or mitigate challenges posed by climate change and ecological change, acknowledging the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Paris Agreement, and welcoming the Government of Iraq's efforts to that effect, in particular noting the Government of Iraq's accession to the UN Water Convention and the Iraq Climate Conference as well as the third Baghdad International Water Conference in 2023,

Calling on the international community to support durable solutions and development efforts while the Government of Iraq assumes responsibility for the provision of humanitarian services,

Noting the Government of Iraq's support for an Independent Strategic Review shared in the letter dated 18 May 2023 from the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Iraq H.E. Fuad Hussein addressed to the Secretary-General of the United Nations,

1. Decides to extend the mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) until 31 May 2024;

2. Requests that the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and UNAMI, at the request of the Government of Iraq, shall:

(a) prioritize the provision of advice, support, and assistance to the Government and people of Iraq on advancing inclusive political dialogue and national and community-level reconciliation, with the full, equal, and meaningful participation of women, taking into account civil society and youth input;

(b) further advise, support, and assist:

# UN Iraq

The United Nations in Iraq | FAST FACTS

(i) the Government of Iraq, the Independent High Electoral Commission and other Iraqi institutions with efforts to strengthen electoral preparation and processes to ensure free and fair elections, including provincial elections and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq parliamentary elections, carried out with transparent processes, including through regular technical reviews and detailed reporting on electoral preparations and processes, as part of the Secretary-General's regular reporting cycle;

(ii) the Government of Iraq and the Council of Representatives on constitutional review, the implementation of constitutional provisions, as well as on the development of processes acceptable to the Government of Iraq to resolve disputed internal boundaries;

(iii) the Government of Iraq with progress on security sector reform, including by prioritizing the planning, funding, and implementation of efforts to strengthen state control and age appropriate and gender-responsive reintegration programmes for former members of armed groups, where and as appropriate, in coordination with other multinational entities;

(iv) the Government of Iraq on facilitating regional dialogue and cooperation, including on issues of border security, clearance of landmines, improvised explosive devices and explosive remnants of war, energy, trade, environment, water, adverse impacts of climate change in particular those contributing to desertification and drought, resilience building, infrastructure, public health, and refugees;

(c) promote, support, and facilitate, in coordination with the Government of Iraq:

(i) the safe, timely, orderly, voluntary and dignified return or local integration, as appropriate, of internally displaced persons, and displaced Iraqis in Syria, including through the efforts of the UN Country Team, and timely access to legal assistance and civil documentation for internally displaced persons and displaced Iraqis in Syria, including persons at risk of statelessness, particularly children without birth registration or other documentation of legal identity;

(ii) the coordination and implementation of programmes to improve Iraq's capacity to provide effective essential civil and social services, including health care, inclusive of psychosocial support services, and education, for its people and continue to support Iraq's regional and international donor coordination towards strengthening national ownership;

(iii) Iraqi, World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and other efforts on economic reform, capacity-building and setting conditions for sustainable development and recovery and reconstruction including in areas affected by terrorism, including through coordination with national and regional organizations and, as appropriate, civil society, donors, and other international institutions;

(iv) the contributions of UN agencies, funds, and programmes to the objectives outlined in this resolution under the unified leadership of the Secretary-General through the Special Representative for Iraq, supported by their designated Deputy;

(d) promote accountability and the protection of human rights, and judicial and legal reform, with full respect for the sovereignty of Iraq, in order to strengthen the rule of law and improve governance in Iraq, in addition to supporting the work of the UN Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh/ISIL (UNITAD) established in resolution 2379 (2017);

(e) approach gender mainstreaming as a crosscutting issue throughout its mandate, including by consulting with diverse women's civil society groups, and to advise and assist the Government of Iraq in ensuring the full, equal and meaningful participation, involvement and representation of women at all levels of decision making, including in the context of elections and government formation, and the promotion of women's economic empowerment, by supporting the implementation of the National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security consistent with resolution 1325 (2000) and related resolutions, and the Joint Communiqué on Prevention and Response to Conflict Related Sexual Violence;

(f) note the importance of treating children affected by armed conflict primarily as victims, and urge the Government of Iraq and UN Country Team to strengthen child protection, including the reintegration of children in accordance with Iraq's national laws and Iraq's obligations under international law, and to support the implementation of the conclusions of the Security Council's Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict; and

(g) actively support the Government of Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government to work together and engage in regular and structured dialogue in order to resolve outstanding issues, in a manner consistent with the unity of Iraq and its constitution, including security provisions, budgetary arrangements and the management of Iraq's oil and gas resources, and to implement existing agreements, including the 2020 Sinjar Agreement;

3. Requests that the Secretary-General, in line with best practices, conduct and provide the Security Council, no later than 31 March 2024, with an independent strategic review of UNAMI, in consultation with the Government of Iraq, in addition to UN agencies, member States, regional organisations, independent experts and civil society, and the Government of Kuwait, consistent with paragraph 4 of resolution 2107 (2013), including:

(a) assessing current threats to Iraq's peace and security, assessing the continued relevance of UNAMI's tasks and priorities, and providing recommendations to optimize UNAMI's mandate, mission structure and staffing to support the Government of Iraq in addressing the challenges of peace and security;

(b) further assessing the options to support the Government of Iraq in strengthening effective regional cooperation on issues outlined in paragraph 2(b)(iv);

4. Recognizes that the security of UN personnel is essential for UNAMI to carry out its work for the benefit of the people of Iraq and calls upon the Government of Iraq to continue to provide security and logistical support to the UN presence in Iraq;

5. Requests the Secretary-General to re-



port to the Council every four months on the progress made towards the fulfilment of all UNAMI's responsibilities;

6. Decides to remain seized of the matter.

## UNITAD

United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh/ISIL (UNITAD) is an independent and impartial accountability mechanism mandated by the United Nations Security Council to support domestic efforts to hold ISIL accountable by collecting, preserving and storing evidence in Iraq of acts that might amount to war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide committed in Iraq. UNITAD was established as a unanimous response from the international community to a request for assistance from the Government of Iraq. Effective cooperation with the Government of Iraq is central to the mandate and activities of UNITAD. Led by a Special Adviser, UNITAD works closely with domestic counterparts to conduct its work in a manner complementing investigations carried out by the national authorities, and in full respect for national sovereignty.

## THE UN COUNTRY TEAM

The United Nations Country Team (UNCT) in Iraq comprises 24 UN Agencies, Funds and specialized Programmes including 19

resident and five non-resident agencies, and coordinates their work through joint work plans: FAO, ILO, OCHA, OHCHR, UNICEF, UNCTAD, UN WOMEN, UNDP, ESCWA, UNESCO, UNEP, UNHCR, UN-HABITAT, UNIDO, UNFPA, UNODC, UNOPS, WFP, WHO, UNMAS, ITC, IFC, IMF and IOM.

Led by the Deputy Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Iraq/ Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator, the UNCT works to improve the lives and livelihoods of all Iraqis by supporting the country in achieving the Sustainable Development Agenda and its related Sustainable Development Goals with the latest specialized expertise and evidence-based actions. The spirit of the Sustainable Development Goals is captured in a single phrase: 'to leave no one behind'. This is the principle that guides everything the United Nations does in Iraq. The overall framework under which the United Nations Country Team delivers is the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) 2020-2024 (formerly UNDAF), which presents the key shared development objectives of the United Nations in the country. The United Nations in Iraq has been working together in a new, coherent way to support the government to achieve its national development priorities and international development commitments, including the Sustainable Development Goals.

### Where does the UN operate in Iraq?

The United Nations family operates in all the 18 governorates of Iraq and operate at the community, governorate, regional and national levels. National and international staff are deployed throughout the country and work in partnership with their local, provincial, regional and national counterparts.

### What is the difference between UNAMI and the other UN entities operating in Iraq?

UNAMI is a political mission established in 2003 at the request of the Government of Iraq.

The presence of the UN organizations in Iraq is established on the basis of bilateral agreements with the Government of Iraq.

UNITAD was established in 2018 as a unanimous response from the international community to a request for assistance from the Government of Iraq.

### How long has the UN been present in Iraq and why?

Iraq is a founding member of the United Nations. A number of UN organizations have been operating in Iraq since 1955. Others established their offices in the early 1990s and again after 2003. The UN continues to be present in Iraq to respond to the needs of the Iraqi people and support their efforts to achieve a peaceful and prosperous future.





## Interview with

Deputy Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General for Iraq for Political Affairs and Electoral Assistance

# MR. CLAUDIO CORDONE

### As the DSRSG for political affairs and electoral assistance what were your priorities in 2023?

In line with UNAMI's mandate, the priority of our political work has continued to be offering our good offices to help resolve outstanding issues and consolidate stability in the country. One important and sensitive issue is the relationship between Baghdad and Erbil, with disagreements on a number of topics, from the national budget share to disputed boundaries. There are also deep fault lines between the main parties in Kurdistan. UNAMI has been working to narrow gaps and encourage all sides to address outstanding issues in a systematic and constructive way.

For example, UNAMI has pressed for the implementation of the 2020 Sinjar Agreement, which was meant to pave the way for the re-establishment of the local administration and a new security force in Sinjar, but regrettably no progress was accom-

plished in 2023 despite all sides maintaining that they were committed to deliver on the Agreement.

In Kirkuk, UNAMI has continued to host negotiations between its Arab, Kurdish and Turkmen communities over power-sharing and addressing the legacy of the Arabization policies under the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein, but despite some progress during the year there was no agreement reached.

On the positive side, UNAMI engaged closely with both governments in Baghdad and Erbil, as well as Iran, to defuse the risk of military confrontation over the presence of Iranian Kurdish opposition groups in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. In line with a security agreement between Iraq and Iran, these groups relocated away from the border with Iran and committed themselves to end military activity.

UNAMI has also deployed additional re-

sources and engaged with the Iraqi authorities in the efforts to address the political and security impact of climate change. As a result of the environmental and economic damage caused by soaring temperatures and water scarcity, among other factors, Iraq is facing tensions between farmers over the use of water and the socio-economic challenges of climate-related displacement, especially from its southern regions. UNAMI has also participated in regional initiatives seeking to address the effects of climate change in a coherent and collaborative way.

Finally, I cannot but note that in 2023 Iraq was impacted by the dramatic rise in regional tensions following the brutal attack by Hamas on 7 October and the devastating Israeli assault on Gaza with the massive humanitarian crisis it created. While the UN as a whole, led by the Secretary-General, sought to achieve a humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza and promote a political solution of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict based on two

states, UNAMI has appealed for restraint by all sides to avoid a spillover of the conflict in Iraq. Unfortunately, by the end of the year the conflict was still raging in Gaza, with Palestinian civilians bearing the brunt of the relentless Israeli assault, while Israeli hostages continued to be held and prospects of a political solution of the conflict remained as distant as ever.

### **How do you see UNAMI's contribution to the preparations for the governorate councils' elections held in December 2023?**

As acknowledged by the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC), UNAMI's played an important role in supporting IHEC during the preparations for the governorates council's elections. We provided technical assistance and advice to IHEC and other Iraqi institutions on various matters, from the use of technology in voting to best practices for dealing with complaints and other issues. Over the years, UNAMI has developed a close and positive working relationship with IHEC. Some of our staff are co-located at IHEC's main office in Baghdad working closely with their IHEC counterparts. In the words of the IHEC Chairperson, judge Omar Mohammed, we are one team. While our advice may not always be heeded, the IHEC / UNAMI collaboration is a good example of how the UN can support Iraqi institutions in full respect for Iraqi sovereignty.

As a result of IHEC's efforts and with the involvement of other Iraqi institutions, such as several ministries and the judiciary, the elections were conducted in an orderly manner on 18 December (16 December for the military and security forces) with very few incidents reported. Complaints were dealt with in the following weeks and the results were certified by IHEC on 21 January 2024. The turnout was 41% of eligible voters, which is not surprising for local elections although some hoped for a wider participation of voters despite calls for a boycott of the elections by a political movement. The number of women elected was 26, slightly higher than the minimum quota required by the Constitution and the electoral law, and very few women were then appointed to administrative positions in the governorates, showing that much still remains to be done to improve women's political representation.

**Speaking about the role of women, on numerous occasions you said publicly that women should be represented at all levels of decision making in Iraq. What**

### **do you think about the position of women in Iraq?**

UNAMI has been keen to hear directly from Iraqi women about their challenges and aspirations, including by working with the National Directorate for Iraqi Women and through two Women Advisory Groups set up in Baghdad and Erbil. One thing that has struck me is the concerns expressed by many women met in these and other forums about what they perceive as persisting hostility to their political and leadership role. Many women are concerned about what they see as strong push-back on their rights, threatening the achievements made in recent years and decades.

One symptom of such push-back in 2023 has been the controversy over the use of the term "gender", a concept which some erroneously interpreted as promoting homosexuality. The controversy led to the official banning of the use of the term "gender" and extended to a backlash towards other concepts such as "women's empowerment". In practice, women activists and NGOs felt intimidated and cut back or froze their activities. Overall this controversy showed that there is misinformation around women's rights as well as persistent resistance to a more equal role of women in Iraq. More in general, there is also a lack of acceptance of diversity in Iraq. While this is not by far unique to Iraqi society, we would like to see these obstacles overcome so that everyone in Iraq would feel safe and enjoy equal rights.

### **How do you see the role of the Iraqi youth?**

Youth under 24 make up 60% of Iraq's population, a notable proportion in a rapidly growing demographic. Not only significant in numbers, but the youth also embody huge potential, and we firmly believe that fostering greater youth engagement is essential for a more democratic Iraq.

In this context, UNAMI has been seeking to contribute to empower Iraqi youth, both male and female, to achieve greater political participation. Rather than relying on traditional capacity-building programs, we have employed innovative methods to stimulate youth involvement, using real-world scenarios. One initiative is the so called "Hackathon", an event since 2021 which encourages youth to come up with original ideas to address climate change within their communities and present them to government officials.

We have also supported youth to present

policy papers, for example one focused on prevalent political, economic, and social challenges facing Iraqi youth, and the other focused on strategies to mitigate climate change's adverse effects. These papers were presented in a roundtable discussion with decision-makers to foster direct engagement between youth and policymakers. In 2024 we will work on further papers to be suggested by the Youth High Council established by the Prime Minister, thus ensuring that these papers remain relevant to the government's policy formulation. Also in collaboration with the Council, in 2024 we plan to support an internship programme aimed at providing youth with practical experience within government institutions.

### **Engagement on the Missing Kuwaiti Persons and Property file, an important task of the Mission, has also continued in 2023. How do you see Iraq – Kuwait relations at the moment?**

This is an important humanitarian task for which UNAMI has a specific mandate conferred by the Security Council since 2013. According to this mandate, we seek to facilitate the dialogue between the two countries and provide technical assistance, for example in terms of searching for sites where Kuwaitis or other third-country nationals may be buried. In carrying out this task we work closely with the International Committee of the Red Cross, which chairs a Tripartite Commission including not only Iraq and Iran, but also Saudi Arabia, France, the United Kingdom, the United States and UNAMI. Progress has been slow. It is indeed a difficult endeavour to locate over 300 persons missing since 1990, but I feel that progress could be faster if enough effort is dedicated to this task. The same is true with regards to the return of missing Iraqi property, including the national archives.

### **What are UNAMI's priorities in its political work in 2024?**

At this moment we are waiting to know the outcome of the Independent Strategic Review of UNAMI's role, and the decisions of the Iraqi Government and the Security Council before UNAMI's mandate expires on 31 May 2024. Meanwhile, pursuant to the current mandate, UNAMI will continue to offer its support, for example by working with the Independent High Electoral Commission in the preparations for the Kurdistan Region of Iraq parliamentary elections. UNAMI remains ready to continue to play a role supporting the Iraqi Government and Iraqi people on key areas, for the duration that will ultimately be decided.



## Interview with

Deputy Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General/  
Humanitarian Coordinator/Resident Coordinator for Iraq

# Mr. Ghulam Mohammad Isaczai

**Year 2023 marked a significant transition of the United Nations family from humanitarian to development activities. How do you see this transition?**

In the dynamic landscape of Iraq, in 2022, the UN family in Iraq underwent a transition from humanitarian to more comprehensive development activities. Despite this strategic shift, the residual needs in the country necessitated the imperative sustenance of humanitarian support to address immediate needs and protect vulnerable populations. As the humanitarian situation improved significantly in 2023, the UN seized the opportunity to reallocate more resources towards development initiatives. This pivotal shift serves as a testament to our commitment to supporting Iraq's ongoing long-term recovery and reconstruction efforts. The focus is now on building the capacity of

local institutions, empowering communities, and ensuring that UN efforts are aligned with the nation's development goals. Collaboration with the Iraqi government and key partners has become paramount in achieving these objectives. The intricate balance between fostering development and continuing humanitarian assistance where necessary exemplifies the UN's nuanced approach to addressing Iraq's multifaceted challenges.

In 2023, we achieved substantial progress, transitioning from crisis management to contributing significantly to the nation's long-term sustainable development goals, enabling us to play a more instrumental role in supporting Iraq's journey towards achieving sustainable development and fostering increased prosperity for its people.

By concentrating efforts on development activities, the UN and its partners in Iraq are jointly engaged in strengthening the capacity of national institutions, empowering local communities, and contributing to the construction of a more resilient and equitable society. The ongoing collaboration with the Iraqi Government and other partners underscores a commitment to ensuring that UN initiatives are seamlessly aligned with the nation's overarching development goals.

In essence, the UN's transition from humanitarian to development activities reflects a strategic evolution in its role within Iraq, signifying a commitment to not only address immediate needs, but also actively contribute to the nation's enduring growth and prosperity.

**UN agencies were heavily involved in**

### **the reconstruction efforts of the liberated areas. Can you tell us more about that?**

In the aftermath of the brutal conflict with the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in Iraq, the UN agencies have emerged as pivotal actors in rebuilding and rehabilitating of the liberated areas. Our work has encompassed not only the provision of essential humanitarian aid but also the reconstruction of critical infrastructure and facilitating the return of displaced populations. Through our collaborative approach, the UN agencies forged strong partnerships with local authorities, communities, and international donor partners. This joint effort aims at identifying priority needs and devising tailored responses to address complex challenges that arose in the wake of the conflict. The UN commitment extends beyond mere relief efforts, encompassing the restoration of basic services such as healthcare, education, and clean water, as well as supporting livelihoods and creating economic opportunities to foster sustainable recovery.

Undoubtedly, one of the key challenges in this monumental task has been the scale of the devastation caused by the conflict. Many areas have been destroyed, demanding a tremendous and sustained effort to rebuild, not just structures but also entire communities. The collaborative spirit, however, has borne fruits, thanks to the joint endeavors and the support of the international community and the Iraqi Government. Together, we have managed to make significant progress in the reconstruction process.

Looking ahead, the commitment remains strong. The UN and its agencies remain determined to support the reconstruction process. Our strategy involves maintaining close collaboration with local partners to ensure that the needs of the most vulnerable segments of the population are addressed comprehensively. The overarching goal is to enable the ongoing work towards enhancing the prosperity and stability in the regions that have endured the pain of the conflict.

### **In 2023 Iraq still needed international assistance in its development projects. How would you evaluate donors' response to the UN appeals?**

2023 marked a significant chapter in the UN's humanitarian and development efforts in Iraq. While we were encouraged

by the response of donor partners to our appeals, there remains a room for enhancing the response and closing the funding gaps.

On a positive note, we witnessed a strong commitment from numerous donors to support the most pressing needs of the Iraqi people. This was echoed in the substantial contributions towards our appeals, with a notable emphasis on those related to durable solutions. Bilateral aid programs also played a pivotal role, amplifying the support network aimed at fostering sustainable development. Despite those commendable efforts, however, there are still challenges that need to be addressed. There has been an uneven pace of responses from some, and the imposition of funding restrictions posed impediments to the UN's ability to address the needs on the ground. A contributing factor to this was the fact that Iraq is currently classified as a middle-income country with substantial revenues, an aspect that seemingly influenced the allocation and speed of international donor partners' funds.

Amidst those challenges, the Iraqi government has played an important role in supporting our development efforts. Both financial contributions and in-kind support bolstered crucial programs spanning healthcare, education, and infrastructure. This collaboration with the Government emerged as a linchpin, ensuring the sustainability and enduring impact of the UN initiatives on the lives of the Iraqi populace.

Acknowledging the challenges faced by the Iraqi government, the UN is grateful for its unwavering commitment to the shared development agenda. The collaborative approach is emphasized with a commitment to closely aligning our programs with the national priorities of Iraq. We will continue to work closely with the Government to ensure achieving a positive difference in the lives of the Iraqi people.

While expressing gratitude for the support received thus far, the UN remains steadfast in its belief that more could be achieved. We are committed to intensifying collaboration with the Government and our donor partners, striving for well-funded appeals and ensuring that programs reach their maximum potential and effectiveness. Against this backdrop, we continue to call for a heightened international cooperation, stressing on the

shared responsibility to create a lasting positive impact in Iraq.

### **In 2023 the Iraqi Government, UN and partners launched the One-UN Plan "A New Beginning," capturing their collective vision for supporting returnees from North-East Syria. Can you give us an overview on the efforts stipulated by the Plan?**

In a bid to facilitate the return of Iraqi nationals from northeast Syria, the One-UN Plan, titled "A New Beginning," was officially launched in 2023. This initiative is a joint effort between the Iraqi government, UN agencies, and various international donor partners, all operating in tandem with the overarching is aligned with the broader goals of the UN in Iraq.

The plan is structured around four strategic objectives designed to address the multifaceted challenges of the return process. Firstly, it aims to actively support the Government's efforts to return all Iraqi nationals from northeast Syria. Simultaneously, the One-UN Plan seeks to provide critical assistance and protection for returnees, emphasizing the paramount importance of their well-being during the reintegration process. Additionally, the initiative places strong emphasis on bolstering accountability and security measures, recognizing the essential role these components play in creating a stable environment for returnees. Furthermore, the plan is committed to promoting age- and gender-sensitive approaches in programming, acknowledging the unique needs and vulnerabilities of various demographic groups.

The plan has a one-year implementation timeframe, demonstrating a flexibility and scalability based on the pace of returns. It is an important step in supporting the recovery and rebuilding efforts in Iraq, and in promoting a more peaceful and prosperous future for the country.

Critical to the success of the such a large-scale initiative is the availability of sufficient funding. The existence of a thought-out strategy to secure the required resources is reassuring. Notably, the ability for donors to contribute directly to UN agencies or through a trust fund adds a layer of flexibility to the funding process, potentially broadening the pool of contributors and contributions. This mechanism showcases a nuanced and strategic approach to resource mobilization.

Moreover, and in line with the principles

of transparency and accountability, the One-UN Plan commits to regular reporting. Such a commitment is vital in fostering trust and confidence among donors and other stakeholders. By keeping all parties apprised of progress, challenges and achievements, the initiative ensures a transparent and collaborative atmosphere.

The importance of a unified approach to monitoring and evaluation cannot be overstated. Such an approach is crucial to ensuring alignment among the various stakeholders, ensuring that their collective efforts are in sync with the broader strategy of the One-UN Plan. The monitoring and evaluation framework is fundamental in gauging the effectiveness of the initiative and steering it towards the realization of its overarching objectives.

In essence, the One-UN Plan emerges as a crucial milestone in supporting Iraq's recovery and rebuilding efforts, while concurrently fostering a more peaceful and prosperous future for the nation. The collaborative spirit and strategic foresight embedded in the plan suggest a comprehensive and thoughtful approach to addressing the complex challenges associated with the return of Iraqi nationals from northeast Syria.

**In September 2023 world leaders met in New York to discuss progress towards the materialization of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). How is the UN team in Iraq contributing to the achievement of sustainable development goals in Iraq?**

The UN team in Iraq has been steadfastly working towards the achievement of the SDGs since their inception in 2015. Through concerted and collaborative efforts and targeted initiatives, the UN team has been at the forefront of addressing key challenges, aligning its work with the SDGs to propel Iraq towards a future grounded in sustainable development and progress. The UN commitment manifests in a multifaceted approach that encompasses a spectrum of activities aimed at nurturing social, economic, and environmental well-being in alignment with the broader SDG framework. Project implementation, technical assistance provision, and the cultivation of partnerships have become integral tools, contributing to positive transformation across the country.

Key contributions of the UN team in Iraq

include a strategic emphasis on prioritizing SDGs in the UN's programming and funding initiatives. By incorporating the SDGs into their projects, the team actively promotes the integration of sustainable development principles at every level. Furthermore, the UN team engages in hands-on initiatives such as providing technical support and training to government officials, civil society representatives, and the private sector. This approach ensures that these stakeholders are equipped with the necessary tools to incorporate the SDGs into their planning and decision-making processes. The impact of such efforts fosters a culture of sustainable development across diverse sectors.

Meanwhile, recognizing the importance of grassroots involvement, the UN in Iraq is actively engaging with local communities and marginalized groups. By incorporating their perspectives into the development planning and implementation processes, the team strives to ensure inclusivity and representation in the nation's journey towards sustainable progress. This engagement enriches the decision-making process and contributes to empowering those communities by enabling them to be stakeholders in the sustainable development endeavors in the country. Moreover, the UN team in Iraq lends its support to initiatives geared towards promoting sustainable growth and development. From championing renewable energy projects, promoting sustainable agriculture practices, and ensuring access to education and healthcare, the team is strategically aligned with key development priorities. This comprehensive approach seeks to address not only immediate needs but also lays the groundwork for a resilient and sustainable future.

In essence, by working closely with a wide range of stakeholders and focusing on key development priorities, the UN team in Iraq is helping to ensure the country's development efforts. Its efforts are not only helping align the nation's development endeavors with the SDGs but also paving the way for a more sustainable, equitable, and prosperous future for the people of Iraq.

**Iraq still encounters many challenges in facing climate changes. How is United Nations helping Iraq to overcome them?**

In a concerted effort to combat the ad-

verse impact of climate change in Iraq, the UN is playing a key role, working in tandem with the Iraqi government, civil society, and various stakeholders. This collaboration is aimed at devising and implementing policies and strategies that not only foster sustainable development but also reduce emissions, thereby contributing to the global fight against climate change.

One of the approaches undertaken by the UN in Iraq involves the provision of technical assistance and support for capacity building across critical sectors, including renewable energy, sustainable urban planning, and waste management. By imparting knowledge and expertise, the UN seeks to empower Iraq with the tools needed to effectively navigate challenges posed by climate change. Furthermore, the UN is acting as a facilitator for dialogue and cooperation among diverse stakeholders, promoting a holistic approach to climate action. This collaborative effort strives to create an environment where all key players work in unison towards common goals, enhancing the impact and effectiveness of climate-related initiatives. In line with this commitment, the UN played an important role in the launch of groundbreaking initiatives such as the Green Sustainable Bank. Geared towards promoting sustainable investments and fostering economic growth, these initiatives reflect the UN's decision to spearhead innovative solutions for climate resilience. A noteworthy milestone in this ongoing partnership occurred during COP28. Led by the UNDP within the framework of Priority Working Group-4, the UN extended substantial support to the Government of Iraq in preparation for the event. This support encompassed aiding Iraq in formulating the COP28 position paper, training negotiators, coordinating consultative workshops, and facilitating the establishment and funding of the Iraqi Pavilion. The pavilion, a historic first for Iraq at COP, served as a center for over 30 side events, including those led by UNCT members, covering diverse topics ranging from climate and peacebuilding to finance, energy, health, agriculture/food security, and youth involvement.

The well-prepared Iraqi Pavilion emerged as a hub of activity, drawing a varied audience and fostering fruitful exchanges, side meetings, and effective partnership building. As a result, Iraq entered formal



negotiations exceptionally well-prepared and supported by a diverse team. Notably, the UN support, through agencies like UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA, FAO and WFP, played a crucial role in sponsoring the active participation of 16 Iraqi youth, aiming to nurture them into future climate activists and negotiators in the country. This initiative underscores the UN's commitment not only to immediate climate action but also to cultivating the next generation of Iraqis dedicated to sustainable practices in Iraq.

### What will be your main priorities for 2024?

In 2024, our priorities in Iraq are defined by a comprehensive and multi-faceted approach aimed at addressing the country's pressing challenges and promoting sustainable development. Our focus areas encompass climate change adaptation, anti-corruption support, access to public services, governance, social protection, and more. This is in addition to our focus on enhancing partnerships which are at the core of our strategy, emphasizing cooperation with government, civil society, academia, the private sector, and donor partners.

Firstly, we are committed to supporting the Iraqi government and stakeholders in designing and implementing innovative and sustainable climate change initiatives. This involves interventions across various sectors, including agriculture, health, water, transport, energy production, and housing infrastructure, with a particular emphasis on areas accommodating internally displaced persons (IDPs) upon their return.

Recognizing the urgency of combating corruption, we are actively partnering

with the Iraqi government to enhance institutional capacity, transparency, and accountability at all levels. Our initiatives supporting the PM's reform agenda, through, but not limited to, the integration of anti-corruption solutions, policies, and joint programs aimed at creating a more transparent and accountable public sector.

In the realm of public services, the UN is dedicated to ensuring access in rural areas, promoting justice for vulnerable groups, and enhancing the capacity of constitutional bodies. We seek to foster citizen participation, especially among young people, women, and marginalized populations, to contribute to enhanced governance and societal cohesion.

The UN is intensifying efforts to address climate change, with a strategic focus on water scarcity, joint climate programming, and the development of comprehensive advocacy, adaptation, and water strategies. Our goal is to strengthen resilience through effective management of natural resources, disaster risk reduction, and pollution and waste management, while expanding support for adaptation and resilience efforts, particularly in social protection. Climate change adaptation and climate security approaches will be mainstreamed throughout our program portfolio to build resilience at both community and institutional levels.

Our commitment to the 2030 Agenda is evident in our ongoing support for its implementation. This includes providing policy advice and aligning activities with national priorities, such as the National Development Strategy and the current Government program.

Inclusive and diversified economic

growth, employment generation, and community resilience will be central to our agenda for the next two years. We will continue to provide humanitarian aid, reduce destabilizing factors, contribute to political, social, security, and economic stability, and support returns from northeast Syria. Special attention will be given to addressing climate migration, with a focus on the South.

Economic development is a key aspect of our strategy, with a focus on creating and supporting jobs, fostering advanced technology and skills, promoting business opportunities, and strengthening capacities for a sustainable and competitive rural economy. We will also concentrate on effective and innovative Active Labour Market Policies, skills development programs, and policies to reduce inequalities.

Embracing data for development and digitalization is a priority in public sector reforms. This involves comprehensive mapping and diagnostic analysis of ongoing and planned data systems, exploring the feasibility of establishing an online monitoring system for SDGs and Vision 2030.

Community reconciliation, social protection, and media partnerships to amplify important messages on climate, durable solutions, violence against women, ending inequality, and fact-based reporting are integral components of our ongoing efforts.

Our strategic partnership with the Government of Iraq and development partners will continue to be reinforced through joint initiatives, joint programming, and work plans. Ensuring the safe and sustainable return of displaced Iraqis remains a key priority, with a focus on finding durable solutions and supporting the gradual transition from emergency assistance to longer-term development.

Finally, the UNCT is committed to ensuring full national ownership of the UNSDCF, which is being developed for the 2024-2029 period, in alignment with SDG priorities in Iraq. We will work closely with relevant authorities and the UNSDCF Steering Committee, striving to remain a steadfast partner of the people and Government of Iraq. Our pledge is to pursue sustainable, inclusive, integrated, effective, and efficient development pathways to achieve the 2030 Agenda for everyone in Iraq.



## Office of Political Affairs and Analysis

**Q&A with**

**Head of UNAMI Office of Political Affairs and Analysis (OPAA)**

**MANOJ MATHEW**

**“**  
**The Iraqi Government has continued its efforts to implement its ministerial programme with progress and challenges**

**”**

**Tell us about the role of your office. Why does your work matter?**

The UNAMI Office of Political Affairs and Analysis (OPAA) supports the Mission leadership in its good offices to promote political dialogue and national and community-level reconciliation. Concretely, our Office supports the Special Representative and the Deputy Special Representative (Political Affairs and Electoral Assistance) in their engagement with

Iraqis at all levels and also provides reporting and analysis. Throughout 2023, the interactions with Iraqi partners has been the most rewarding aspect of our work – be it cooperation with government officials, political parties, community representatives, women and youth activists, or religious figures and minorities. The UNAMI offices in Basrah, Erbil, Kirkuk and Ninewa play an important part to advance the work in the differ-



ent parts of the country. This includes the efforts to promote peaceful coexistence in historically disputed territories or to support constructive relations between the Federal Government and the Kurdistan Regional Government.

### How would you sum-up 2023 from the political perspective?

2023 was yet another crucial year for Iraq. The Iraqi Government has continued its efforts to implement its ministerial programme with progress and challenges. The adoption of the triannual Federal Budget Law in June was a key deliverable, preceded by intense political debates. With record levels of revenue, spending and deficit, the federal budget placed service delivery at its center; its implementation is not a straightforward task.

The holding of Governorate Council elections in December 2023 marked another milestone, realizing a constitutional right that had been postponed for a decade. These elections were held in 15 federal provinces for the first time in ten years; and in Kirkuk Governorate, they were the first election to be held since 2005.

The political dynamics have also been shaped by changes in leadership positions, notably regarding the Speakership of the Council of Representatives. At the same time, the regional dynamics have had significant ripple effects on the security and political landscape, especially since October.

### What have been concrete achievements and highlights for OPAA over the past year?

Our engagement with Iraqi youth has been an uplifting and promising undertaking, in coordination with the Prime Minister's Office and the High Youth Council and with local partners. Throughout 2023, OPAA facilitated activities in eight Governorates aimed at enhancing youth political involvement and encouraging proactive roles in tackling community issues, particularly climate change. These activities spanned a summer school in Sulaimaniya, capacity-building workshops



in Baghdad and Karbala, and a Youth Action Competition in Mosul. It was inspiring to see the innovative drive and shared commitment of Iraqi youth from all parts of the country - be it Anbar, Najaf or Dohuk - to jointly brainstorm about the most pressing issues of their generation and present their own initiatives, with the support and guidance of experts. These activities culminated in a national-level roundtable discussion in Baghdad that brought together youths and members of the Youth High Council, established in August by the Prime Minister. This provided a unique platform for the youth to voice their concerns and present their policy recommendations for informing government programs and policies.

### Let us turn towards the future. What are your expectations for 2024?

Crucial topics come to mind for Iraq's future - be it much-needed economic reforms, inclusive and governance, the implementation of the Constitution, tackling the impact of climate change, border security, or the overall positioning of Iraq on the world scene. Such aspects are also reflected in the governmental programme. In 2024, the formation of Governorate Councils will be important for services provision and governance at the local level. Good

relations between the federal Government and the Kurdistan Regional Government will also be important for the stability of Iraq as a whole. The Kurdistan Region of Iraq is also expected to hold its delayed parliamentary elections, which remain essential to foster democratically empowered institutions. For Iraq and its people, I hope that all stakeholders will work with a common vision for the country and seize the opportunities ahead of them, taking into considerations concerns of all segments of society. Our office looks forward to continue supporting our Iraqi partners in these fields, on their request and guided by our mandate.

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The holding of Governorate Council elections in December 2023 marked another milestone, realizing a constitutional right that had been postponed for a decade

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## Office of Electoral Assistance

### Introduction

### The Role of UNAMI in Iraq's Electoral Process

Since its inception in 2005, the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) has been playing a crucial and multifaceted role in the landscape of Iraqi elections, embodying the United Nations' commitment to supporting democracy and governance in post-conflict societies. UNAMI's support to the electoral process is both strategic and impactful. At the heart of its mandate lies the responsibility to provide comprehensive electoral assistance, a task that involves a range of activities from

technical and advisory support to capacity building for the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC).

UNAMI, through its Office of Electoral Assistance (OEA), has been instrumental in providing comprehensive electoral support to IHEC to conduct free, credible, and transparent elections in Iraq.

UNAMI's contribution towards the Iraqi electoral process, not only contributes to the democratic framework of the country but also instills confidence

among its citizens in the democratic and electoral system. The mission's ongoing support to IHEC, particularly in areas like operations, IT, legal, communications and public outreach underscores its unwavering commitment to fostering a democratic culture in Iraq.

By supporting the IHEC in successfully conducting the 2023 Governorate Council (GC) elections, which achieved a voter turnout of 41%, the UNAMI OEA team significantly fulfilled one of the key mandates of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) for UNAMI.

## Governorate Council Elections 2023

2023 marked a significant year in Iraq's democratic journey, with the long-awaited Governorate Council elections in 15 governorates (except for the Kurdistan region – Erbil, Dohuk and Sulaymaniyah). These elections, the first in a decade and since 2005 in Kirkuk, were held on December 18th, with special voting for security forces and internally displaced persons (IDPs) on December 16th. UNAMI's OEA provided technical assistance during this period, overcoming many challenges such as budget constraints and limited staff capacity.

The elections witnessed a 41% voter turnout, with 6.6 million of 16.1 million eligible voters participating. IHEC announced preliminary results within 24 hours through a press conference, which was also broadcasted through its social media channels. Subsequently, the preliminary results were published on the IHEC website. Notably, this marked the

first time that the live press conference was broadcasted through social media and that the website operated smoothly following the publication of the result.

Over 5,900 candidates, including 1,662 women, participated in the electoral process for the 285 seats, of which 75 were reserved for women and 10 for minority quotas.

Over 200,000 polling and counting staff, 33% women, were recruited and trained. The focus on developing user-friendly procedural manuals, a comprehensive operational plan, and extensive communications and voter education initiatives significantly contributed to the process's success. Additionally, the establishment of three (3) monitoring committees within IHEC for electoral campaign violations, (over 700 cases processed, over 300,000 national and international observers), underscored the robustness of IHEC's electoral framework.

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**By supporting the IHEC in successfully conducting the 2023 Governorate Council (GC) elections, which achieved a voter turnout of 41%, the UNAMI OEA team significantly fulfilled one of the key mandates of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) for UNAMI**

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## UNAMI OEA's Comprehensive Support and Achievements

### UN Leadership's Engagement:

The Special Representative attended a simulation of election day processes organized by the Commission. This event included a detailed demonstration of all electronic devices planned for use on election day. On December 5, the Special Representative, alongside the Deputy Representative for Political Affairs and Electoral Assistance, met with the Commission's Board of Commissioners to receive briefings on the status of electoral preparations.

The Deputy Representative for Political Affairs and Electoral Assistance, Mr. Claudio Cordone, along with the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General

(DSRSG) for Humanitarian Coordination, visited the polling centers on Election Day.

Director for UN Integrated Electoral Assistance and UN Principal Electoral Advisor Dr. Aamir A. Arain, was involved with IHEC's senior management and strategic operations on a daily basis. Additionally, Dr. Arain engaged with the Federal Supreme Court on electoral matters, engaged with civil society organizations, and regularly updated the diplomatic community in Iraq on electoral developments.

### Technical Assistance and Advisory Support:

UNAMI OEA's role in supporting IHEC's operational, logistical, and technical aspects was crucial. This included support in the development of relevant regulations and procedures, preparations logistics, and ICT infrastructure. Five simulation exercises were conducted to test the voting system which ensured preparedness and confidence in the election processes. The attendance of UNAMI representatives at these events underscored the UN's commitment to supporting IHEC's electoral journey.

### Capacity Building and Training:

In addition to the daily on-site support, between March and July 2023, the UNAMI Office of Electoral Assistance (OEA) conducted a series of capacity-building training sessions for IHEC employees. Over 200 IHEC staff members received residential training in IT, security, procedures, and digital communications.



## Civil Society Organizations (CSO) Engagement and Workshops:

The OEA facilitated collaboration between IHEC and CSOs, facilitating workshops that brought together 400 IHEC and CSOs representatives. This initiative fostered mutual understanding and cooperation in voter education and election observation, leading to the accreditation of over 300,000 local observers. Additionally, IHEC conducted over 25 educational workshops with various electoral stakeholders.

## Communications, Media, and Public Outreach:

The OEA team assisted IHEC in developing a comprehensive communications, media, and public outreach plan for the 2023 GC elections. Divided into three phases, the plan encompassed the use of both traditional and innovative, cost-effective tools and approaches. These included media engagement, the development of Information Education and Communication (IEC) materials, proactive use of digital and social media, the launch of fact-checking campaigns, mass SMS campaigns, and leveraging prominent Iraqi TV stations to broadcast IHEC's messages. Furthermore, the OEA developed social media policies and guidelines,

an election-day media plan, and a post-election media plan, which were shared with IHEC for adoption and implementation.

Embracing the concept of a 'One UN' integrated mission, UNAMI's Office of Electoral Assistance (OEA) collaborated with the UNAMI Human Rights Office to conduct a workshop on fact-checking tools and strategies.

Events like the conference on media's role in promoting electoral participation organized by the president's office attended by the UNAMI leadership highlighted the importance of media and public engagement in the electoral process.

## Focus on Women's Participation and Security:

Measures to address security concerns for women candidates and the establishment of hotlines for complaints underscored the focus on inclusive and safe electoral participation. IHEC conducted a capacity building training for the women candidates on individual security and social media attended by the OEA team.

## UNAMI's 'One UN' Ethos:

The collaboration with various UN entities, including UNOPS and UNDP, highlighted the integrated approach of UNAMI in fulfilling its electoral mandate.

## The future ahead: Reflecting on the 2023 Governorate Councils Elections

The 2023 Governorate Council elections in Iraq, facilitated by the collaborative efforts of UNAMI OEA as a one team to support IHEC stand as a testament to the commitment to democratic processes in Iraq. The successful conduct of these elections, characterized by inclusivity, accessibility, and positive public perception, reflects the resilience and progress of Iraq's electoral system. This year's achievements set a benchmark for future electoral events in Iraq.

Looking ahead to 2024, Iraq is preparing for the parliamentary elections in the Kurdistan region. UNAMI's Office of Electoral Assistance (OEA) will continue to extend its technical and advisory support to IHEC, to conduct transparent and credible elections in the region. As 2025 approaches, the OEA will also support IHEC in its preparations for the Council of Representatives (CoR) elections. In the meantime, the OEA will persist in assisting IHEC with reviewing and reflecting on accomplishments, documenting lessons learned, and conducting strategic reviews to enhance both its internal coordination and communications, as well as its coordination with external stakeholders.

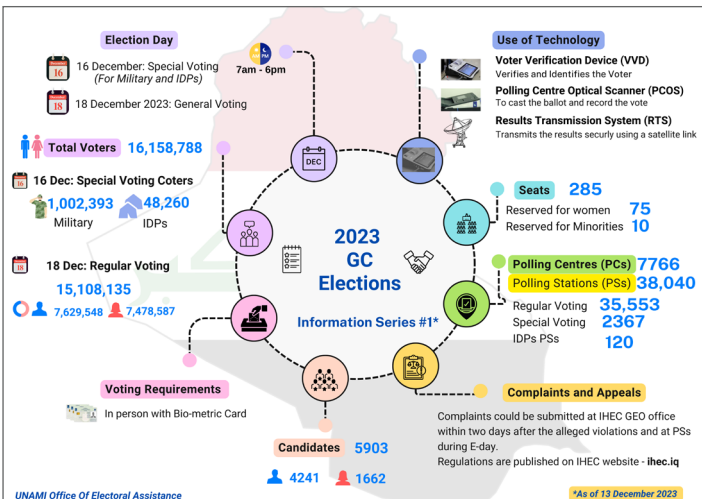


Fig 1: Infographic on GC Elections produced by OEA

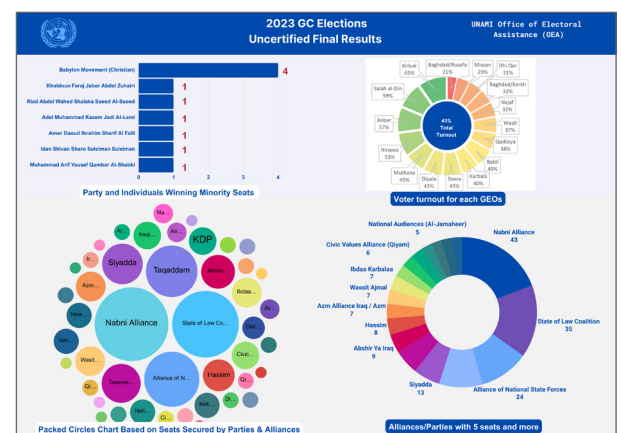
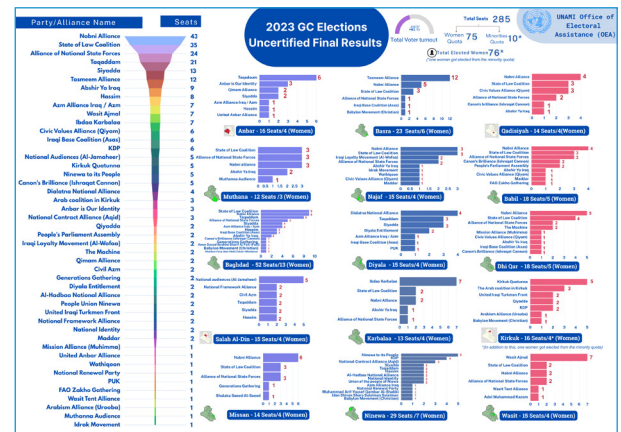


Fig 2 and 3: Infographic on uncertified final results

# Human Rights Office

## An Overview of the Activities in 2023



### What is the human rights mandate of UNAMI?

UNAMI Human Rights Office (HRO) is responsible for the implementation of the Mission's human rights mandate in accordance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 2682 (2023) and its preceding resolutions to promote accountability and the protection of human rights, and judicial and legal reform to strengthen the rule of law and improve governance in Iraq.

In 2023, HRO continued engagement with the Government of Iraq to support efforts for the promotion and protection of human rights of all citizens of Iraq. Our office also engaged with the Government of Iraq to promote legislative and policy measures to increase respect for human rights and enhance engagement with the United Nations human rights mechanisms. HRO also worked closely with the Iraqi High Commission for Human Rights (IHCHR), civil society and the UN Country Team for increased monitoring and reporting on human rights issues and advocacy to strengthen the protection and respect for human rights.

### How did the human rights situation evolve in Iraq in 2023?

In 2023, small-scale peaceful protests continued in various governorates with

people demanding access to economic and social rights, including improved access to education, healthcare, water and better employment opportunities, an end to corruption and accountability for human rights violations and abuses.

Despite ongoing demands, accountability for human rights violations and abuses remained limited amidst constricted civic space and challenges in exercising the right to freedom of expression, criminal defamation charges, obstruction and harassment of media workers, threats and intimidation against journalists and civil society activists.

The endorsement of legislation, compliant with international human rights norms and standard, is critical to strengthen protection and accountability of human rights in Iraq. Although a new government has been in place since October 2022, the endorsement of a number of draft bills, including the Anti-Domestic Violence, Freedom of Expression, and the Protection from Enforced Disappearance laws, remained pending during 2023.

HRO continued efforts to promote independent functioning of the IHCHR in accordance with the Paris Principles and for the selection of its Board of Commissioners. In February 2023, the Council

of Representatives voted to establish a 15-member Committee of Experts to select the Board of Commissioners. HRO continued efforts and sustained engagement with members of the Parliamentary Human Rights Committee to ensure the selection adheres to the standards of competence, professionalism, and independence as outlined in the Paris Principles. The 4-year term of office for the IHCHR Board of Commissioners expired in July 2021.

### What has UNAMI HRO done for the preservation and expansion of civic space?

The protection of freedom of expression and the right to peaceful assembly is a core priority for UNAMI HRO. The Mission engaged in monitoring and reporting on the situation of activists, human rights defenders, journalists, and media workers. In 2023, civil society activists, human rights defenders and journalists continued to face arrests, harassment, threats, and restrictions, preventing them from performing their legitimate roles in society. The targeting of activists and journalists under the guise of defamation or for alleged publication of content considered 'derogatory' was noted with increased concern.

For the preservation and expansion of civic space, HRO extensively engaged in promoting the freedom of expression and the right to peaceful assembly, protection of journalists/women journalists, and prevention of online threats and harassment and promoted measures to enhance their capacity to engage effectively in the promotion and protection of human rights, highlighting issues of public concern and raising awareness about human rights. Moreover, HRO engaged in advocacy with various entities of the government, civil society, and the IHCHR to promote legislative and policy measures for the preservation and expansion of civic space in line with the Constitution of Iraq and its international obligations.



UNAMI HRO facilitated a series of five capacity-building trainings, two-day each, for Iraqi female journalists in Baghdad, Anbar, Basra, Mosul, and Najaf to equip participants with strategies and tools to integrate human rights perspectives, and rights-based approach in their journalistic reporting and to empowering female journalists as trainers to replicate this training. The Phase II of this project concluded with a national conference organized jointly with the Iraqi Women Journalist Forum under the auspices of the OHCHR Global Drive for Media Freedom, Access to Information and Safety of Journalists Project. The Phase I was implemented in 2022 with eighteen online trainings and one Training of Trainer event benefitting women journalists, bloggers, human rights defenders, and defense lawyers.

During 2023, HRO organized a series of five training events organized in Baghdad, Karbala, Kirkuk and Thi-Qar, attended journalists, lawyers, civil society, and representatives of the IHCHR for the safe use of cyberspace, protect the right to freedom of expression and to counter hate speech. The training series concluded with a three-day training of trainers' workshop in Erbil on 'Digital Security and Digital Rights' from 30 November to 2 December. The project was implemented jointly with the Iraqi Network for social media.

**What is UNAMI doing to protect human rights in the administration of justice?**

HRO engagement in promoting human rights in the administration of justice enhances measures for conflict prevention, building social cohesion and respect for the rule of law. For this purpose, HRO continued to implement its detention and trial monitoring programme particularly focused on observing the trials of ISIL suspects and promote compliance

with procedural guarantees, detention safeguards, fair trial standards and juvenile justice in Iraq. Following high-level advocacy and engagement by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights during his visit to Iraq in August 2023, the detention monitoring programme resumed. To promote fair trial guarantees and procedural safeguards, in 2023, HRO conducted 381 trial monitoring missions and monitored 230 anti-corruption trials as part of UNAMI-UNDP joint project on anti-corruption.

HRO implemented activities to enhance capacity and supported efforts for the prohibition of torture and ill-treatment, increased understanding, and implementation of due process principles by law enforcement officials, protecting the right of the defendants in relation to investigation, and the right to a legal representation. Technical cooperation activities also focused on the Iraqi and international human rights law framework governing legitimate arrests and investigations as well as the prohibition of torture and ill-treatment, enhancing the role of defence lawyers in the fight against corruption.

Additionally, HRO facilitated dialogues with law enforcement officials, investigative officers from different police departments, representatives of the IHCHR, civil society, and defence lawyers to enhance the understanding of due process principles and their implementation within the law enforcement context, including safeguarding the investigation, the right to remain silent, the right to a legal representation and the prevention of arbitrary detention or arrest and the prohibition against torture and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment.

Furthermore, HRO enhanced capacity of lawyers from the Iraqi Bar Association and civil society on the role of and challenges faced by defense lawyers in the

Iraqi justice system, and engaged with women judges from the Iraqi Women Judges Association on addressing challenges to the investigation of corruption and explore opportunities to support and enhance their role in the fight against corruption.

What role did UNAMI HRO play in promoting women and children's rights, particularly protection of women from domestic and gender-based violence?

HRO jointly with UNAMI Gender Unit, UN WOMEN, and other UN Country Team partners, engaged in promoting the protection for women, including protection from domestic and gender-based violence and their meaningful participation in decision-making processes. UNAMI encouraged efforts to further develop and implement appropriate and effective strategies and plans for the advancement of women in judicial justice systems and institutions at the leadership, managerial and other levels to promote the full and equal participation of women at all levels of the judiciary.

In November, UNAMI conducted a high-level dialogue in Erbil to establish a mechanism dedicated to promoting accountability measures for criminal violence in domestic settings to enable effective coordination to tackle domestic violence and promote the accountability of perpetrators. UNAMI engaged with interlocutors to advance justice for women by strengthening the judicial system to prevent violence against women by reinforcing accountability measures.

HRO engaged in monitoring and reporting the situation of children affected by armed conflict, including the documentation of six grave violations against children. In 2023, the Government of Iraq signed the Action Plan for the prevention of the use and recruitment of children by the Popular Mobilization Forces. To support the implementation of the



Action Plan, UNAMI provided technical support to the Government and the PMF for enhancing measures for the protection of children.

### **How did UNAMI HRO support the Government of Iraq in implementing its commitments with regard to enforced disappearances?**

Enforced disappearance, both from the past and recent, continues to remain a serious human rights concern in Iraq. In April 2023, the UN Committee on Enforced Disappearances (CED) released its full report on its visit to Iraq in November 2022. As stipulated in the report, the Government of Iraq submitted its comments on the report in August 2023. The CED also engaged to promote the implementation of the recommendations contained in the reports, including its meetings with the Permanent Mission of Iraq in Geneva. Following the release of the concluding observations, HRO engaged with the Government to facilitate dialogue with the CED. In August 2023, the Government submitted its response to the Concluding Observations by the CED. The CED had visited Iraq from 12 to 24 November 2022 and engaged with government officials, victims, civil society organizations, UN officials and the diplomatic community.

### **What role did UNAMI HRO play during the Human Rights 75 Initiative celebrating the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights?**

Throughout 2023, HRO organized events in the framework of the Human Rights 75 initiative to promote justice, equality and respect for human rights using various themes of the campaign. HRO organized events on the theme of "Racial Justice - Promoting the Human Rights of People of African Descent", bringing together Iraqis of African descent, the Romas and other minority communities,



government officials and civil society to discuss the importance of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in promoting and protecting racial justice, equality and accountability in Iraq and its obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, and the role of government and civil in combatting racism, racial discrimination and related intolerance in Iraq.

HRO in partnership with the Babylon Film Institute organized a human rights documentary film festival, which included the screening of short films and documentaries on human rights themes in Babil, Baghdad, and Ninewa Governorates. The film screening highlighted the rights of persons with disabilities, children, accountability, and the impact of climate change on lives and livelihoods. These open events attracted significant attention by general public, thus raising awareness about critical human rights concerns.

On 13 December, HRO organized film screening and an arts exhibition at the UN Integrated Compound in Baghdad for government officials, civil society activists, members of the diplomatic community, and UN personnel to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and to mark the International Human Rights Day.

Promoting dialogue among stakeholders to counter hate speech is one of the commitments in the UNAMI Plan of Action on Hate Speech. To commemorate the International Day for Countering Hate Speech, and as part of the Human Rights 75 Initiative, HRO organized a dialogue on the role of media, including creators of social media content, in countering hate speech in Iraq. The event was attended by representatives from government ministries and departments, the Communication and Media



Commission, the High Judicial Council, traditional media experts and social media influencers, the IHCHR, religious and ethnic groups, journalists, activists, and civil society organizations. The dialogue focused on a range of topics, including minority perspectives on hate speech and social cohesion, as well as strengthening partnerships with media outlets and social media companies to address hate speech.

### **What steps UNAMI HRO took to address human rights of Iraqi societal components?**

HRO worked closely with civil society, government officials and Iraqi societal components to enhance efforts for the promotion and protection of the rights of ethnic and religious components of Iraq. Structured engagement with minority youth and marginalized groups enabled increased awareness and concerted action by civil society to engage with the UN human rights mechanisms and Government of Iraq for the adoption of measures to increase protection for minorities and promote social cohesion and peaceful co-existence. HRO engaged in advocacy aimed at encouraging the Government of Iraq to implement the existing laws, strengthen relevant institutional frameworks and mechanisms to enhance protection for minorities, increase opportunities for economic and social rights, and to promote their full and meaningful participation in decision-making processes at all levels. HRO jointly with civil society organizations and the IHCHR, engaged in dialogue with the Prime Minister's Adviser on Component Affairs and the minority members of the Council of Representatives to promote measures for the protection of minority rights.

HRO engaged with stakeholders and implemented capacity building projects to address the root causes of racial discrimi-

nation, promote racial justice and to address systematic patterns of violence against ethno-religious groups. HRO enhanced the capacity of civil society organizations to promote the protection for the human rights of Iraq's ethnic and religious minorities and to encourage dialogue between the Government of Iraq, civil society, and the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

As part of efforts to promote protection for the human rights of ethnic and religious minorities and social cohesion, HRO organized a series of two three-day workshops on the 'The Right to Education' bringing together a diverse group of educators and education advocates, reflecting the diversity of Iraqi society including Christian, Yazidi, Kakai, Turkman, Shabak, Zoroastrian, Arabs, Kurds, attended the workshop. The workshops formed part of efforts to promote equal and inclusive right to education for Iraq's diverse societal components. The workshop provided space to unpack key legal and theoretical frameworks and to highlight critical issues, challenges, and impediments while generating practical policy recommendations to address these concerns. The participants discussed the need for inclusive representation in the curriculum to ensure the right to equitable education for all groups. The workshops were followed by a series of three dialogues in Erbil and Baghdad in November 2023 to support the implementation of recommendations of the two UNAMI reports on the right to education.

Additionally, HRO organized three events in Baghdad, Erbil and Basra on Diversity as a tool for the promotion and protection of human rights, having a particular focus on minority rights within the framework of the Human Rights 75 Initiative celebrating the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, highlighted strategies for strengthening collaboration among all stakeholders on the promotion and protection of minority rights in Iraq.

To promote social cohesion and respect for the rights of religious and ethnic minorities, HRO continued to coordinate the implementation of UNAMI Plan of Action on Hate Speech, documented incidents of hate speech, including incitement to religious hatred, organized dialogues amongst stakeholders, and



provided technical support to the government of Iraq for the adoption of policies and measures to counter hate speech. For this purpose, UNAMI engaged with the Supreme Committee to counter hate speech - appointed by the Prime Minister - to support the development of a national strategy to counter hate speech. This is work in progress.

**How many capacity building/training activities did HRO organize during 2023? Who were the participants?**

In 2023, HRO organized 113 capacity building workshops/training events in Babylon, Baghdad, Basra, Erbil, Karbala, Kirkuk, Mosul and Wasit. In total, 1,703 participants (983 men and 720 women) benefitted from these capacity building activities. These events were attended by lawyers, civil society activists and networks, human rights defenders, women rights activists and women's rights NGOs, government officials, judges, and staff of the Iraq High Commission for Human Rights.

**Does your office engage with youth, women and organizations working on disability rights?**

In 2023, HRO engaged with forty-six youth-led organizations across Iraq promoting engagement of young people in the promotion and protection of human rights. Moreover, HRO established new partnerships with youth and youth-led organizations advocating for human rights and effective ways to address climate change, thus enhancing ability of civil society activists on climate change and human rights issues for concrete

action on the right to health, water, and sustainable agricultural practices.

HRO engaged and collaborated with ninety-one women-led organizations across Iraq for the protection of women's rights. During the 16 days of activism against gender-based violence campaign, HRO engaged with civil society and government counterparts to promote and strengthen measures to criminalize domestic violence, formalize effective support systems for survivors and hold perpetrators of domestic violence. Moreover, HRO engaged in dialogue with stakeholders and organized focus group discussions to promote accountability for conflict-related sexual violence and supported efforts for the implementation of Yazidi Survivors Law.

To promote the human rights of persons with disabilities, HRO engaged and collaborated with twenty-six organizations of persons with disabilities. Additionally, HRO continued to support the implementation of the UN Disability Inclusion Strategy.

**Does UNAMI Human Rights Office work to promote human rights in the context of climate change?**

Iraq is one of the countries most affected by the impact of climate change. HRO promotes rights-based interventions in climate change and advocates for the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, including the right to clean air; a safe and stable climate; access to safe water and adequate sanitation; healthy and sustainably produced food; non-toxic environments in which to live,



work, study and play; and healthy biodiversity and ecosystems. HRO organized events with youth actively engaged in promoting human rights in the context of climate change.

### What was the focus of discussions during the visit to Iraq by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights?

The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Turk, visited Iraq from 6 to 9 August 2023, and held constructive discussions with the Prime Minister of Iraq, the President and Prime Minister of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and other high-level officials in Baghdad, Basra and Erbil. Mr. Turk also met with civil society, including women human rights defenders, environmental activists, journalists, lawyers, and representatives from ethnic and religious communities. The discussions focused on shrinking civic space, minority rights, women's rights, rule of law and conditions of places of detention, missing persons, and enforced disappearance, and issues of inequality, discrimination, accountability and impunity for human rights violations, crimes against activists, journalists, and demonstrators, as well as human rights in the digital space and an official moratorium on the use of the death penalty. He also saw first-hand the serious environmental degradation resulting from a toxic mix of violence, oil industry excesses, global warming, reduced rainfall, and a lack of effective environmental protection measures, including poor water management and regulation and the impact of climate change on human rights.

### What was the purpose of visit to Iraq by the United Nations Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict?

The United Nations Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Virginia Gamba, visited Iraq from 7 to 11 January 2024 and met with the President of Iraq, the Prime Minister of the Kurdistan Regional Government and senior government officials in Baghdad. She commended the progress made by the Iraqi Government on the protection of conflict-affected children, welcomed the signing of the Action Plan by the Government in March 2023 to prevent the recruitment and use of children by the Popular Mobilization

Forces and significant progress achieved in its implementation. SRS Gamba also met with the diplomatic community and members of the United Nations Country Team.

### What are UNAMI's human rights priorities in 2024?

In 2024, UNAMI HRO will continue to support the Government of Iraq, civil society, and the IHCHR to promote and protect human rights as per the Security Council mandate and in accordance with Iraq's national and international human rights commitments. UNAMI HRO priorities in 2024 include:

- Monitoring and reporting on human rights developments to highlight issues and concerns;
- Engagement with the Government of Iraq to enhance institutional capacity for the promotion and protection of human rights;
- Advocacy for the adoption of legislation and policies to strengthen human rights protection;
- Protection of civic and democratic space and creation of enabling environment for civil society actors, including human rights defenders, journalists and media workers through laws and policies compliant with international standards;
- Strengthening the rule of law and fair trial standards through a comprehensive legislative, policy, and institutional reform process to ensure respect for international due process and fair trial standards;
- Promoting accountability for human rights violations and abuses, included

targeted killings, abductions, threats and harassment of activists, human rights defenders, journalists, and protesters;

- Protection and promotion of the rights of religious and ethnic minorities, diversity, and inclusive and non-discriminatory policies to achieve social cohesion and peaceful coexistence;
- Promoting compliance with international law and the Constitution of Iraq, concerning accountability for perpetrators of domestic and gender-based violence, and conflict-related sexual violence and protection of women's rights and inclusion of women in decision-making processes;
- Promoting and advocating for endorsement of legislation and policies for the protection of civilians from the effects of violence and insecurity and respect for human rights during counter-terrorism operations in compliance with international human rights norms and standards;
- Protection of children affected by conflict, violence and insecurity and safeguarding human rights of children deprived of liberty;
- Advocacy and engagement with stakeholders to raise awareness on the impact of climate change on human rights and provision of technical advice and support;
- Awareness raising and strengthening capacity of climate change activists and other stakeholders to promote practical measures to reduce the impact of climate change on human rights.



## Development Support Office (DSO)

**Through the efforts of its staff, DSO actively supports partnership forums at both the governorates and regional levels**



**D**evelopment Support Office (DSO) marked Numerous milestones in 2023, enhancing its focus on facilitation, coordination, and collaboration. Through the efforts of its staff, it actively supported partnership forums at both the governorates and regional levels, while undertaking other vital responsibilities and roles throughout the year.

Under the guidance of the Resident Coordinator (RC), the Durable Solution (DS) Taskforce, in May 2023, endorsed the establishment of a Joint Coordination Forum (JCF) in five conflict-affected governorates, in addition to Basrah and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI). Given its joint nature, the RC communicated this initiative to Iraq Council of Ministers Secretariat (COMSEC), secur-

ing their endorsement, and directives have been transmitted to the concerned governors' offices to lead the JCF's establishment. In the KRI, the Minister of Interior has expressed support for the concept, designating the Joint Coordination and Crises Cell (JCCC) to co-chair the JCF at the regional level. Likewise, in the rest of Iraq, DSO at the governorate level has actively engaged the local authorities and aid workers to shape the JCF membership. Inaugural meetings are slated for January 2024, with DSO staff assuming the responsibility of providing secretarial support to the JCF throughout the country.

Elsewhere, DSO diligently supported Area Based Coordination (ABC) efforts in Kirkuk, Anbar, Dayala, Ninewa and Saladin. In its capacity as the Secre-

tariat, DSO facilitated and attended (48) monthly Area-Based Coordination (ABC) meetings and (10) roundtable sessions in collaboration with the local government authorities. It also contributed to the effective compilation and dissemination of information on the needs, gaps, and activities of the partners related to DS to maximize the benefits of experience-sharing. Furthermore, DSO played a crucial role in finalizing and disseminating the ABC plans of action and location analysis. In the Southern Hub, for example, ABC, co-chaired by FAO and UNDP, organized, facilitated, and provided secretariat service to four meetings focusing on Agriculture and Water, which are key sectors in the Southern region.

Regarding development coordination,

Kurdistan governorates witnessed 22 engagements involving local government departments, development partners, technical experts, and relevant entities. In addition, DSO conducted seven programme-related field visits in connection to ongoing programmes. Meanwhile, in the Southern governorates, DSO prepared the UN Projects Profile for 2023/24 in both English and Arabic and shared with various stakeholders. In addition, DSO convened focused meetings with key partners - local government, UN agencies, NGOs, local communities, and the private sector to discuss the SDGs, climate change impacts and other development issues. 19 reports were prepared and shared with DSO-RCO management. DSO also played a pivotal role in supporting Planning and Development Councils and SDG committees at the governorate level.

In its commitment to advance Climate Change initiatives, DSO conducted extensive outreach, engaging a wide range of interlocutors, including local government, local communities, UN agencies, NGOs, civil society organizations, academia, and private sectors. Focused on the impact of climate change, DSO collected and analyzed data on climate-induced migration, water scarcity, pollution, and loss of livelihoods in the marshlands in the South. The findings culminated in 12 papers shared with all relevant parties. DSO actively supported the RCO, several UN agencies, the SRSR and DSRSG/RC/HC in their participation in the National Climate Change Conference on 12-13 March 2023, in Basra. Prominent figures, including Iraq's Prime Minister Sudani, and key ministries and departments, such as water, environment, oil, agriculture, planning, finance, and women's affairs, attended the conference. The UN played a pivotal role, with the SRSR delivering the opening statement and various UN agencies participated as moderators and panelists in various sessions. The conference yielded a set of actionable recommendations.

DSO staff pursued a unified focus through participating in the Climate,

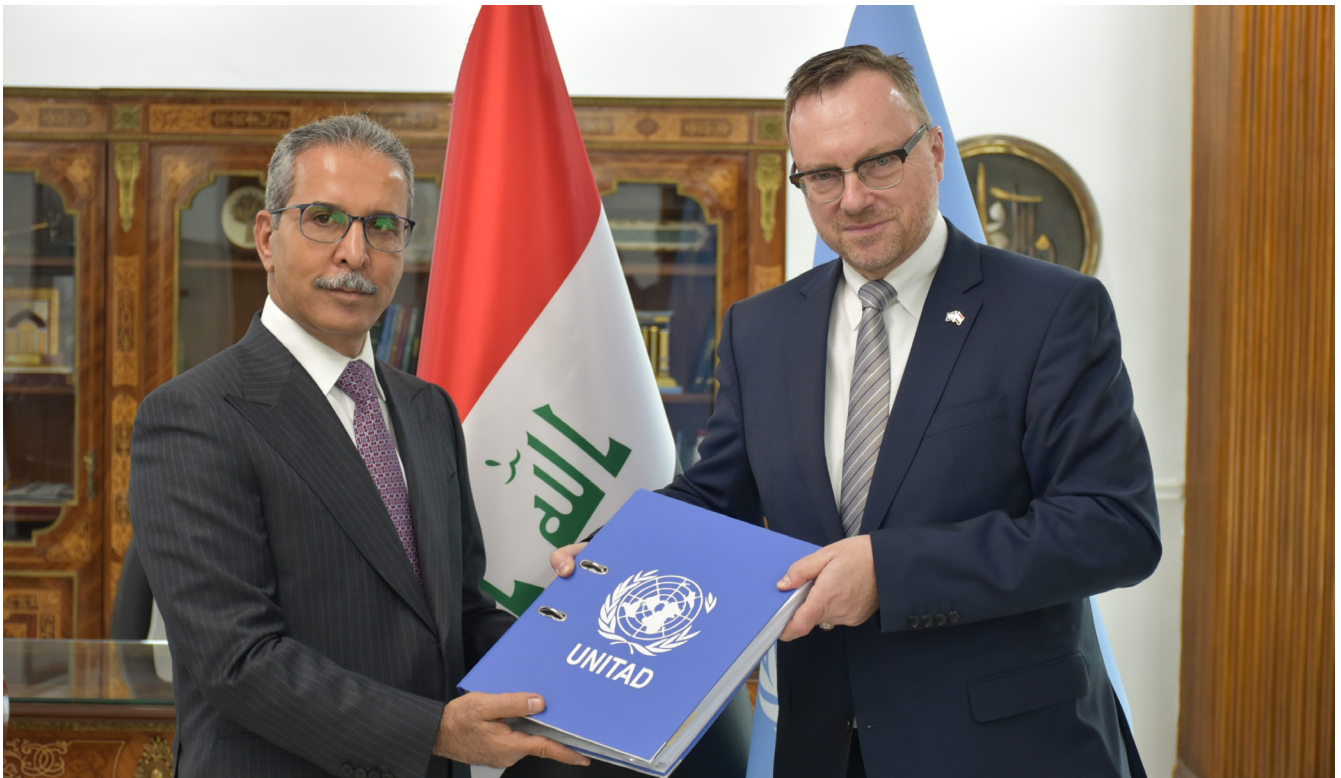
Peace and Security Risk Analysis Training organized by the UNAMI OPAA and DSO/RCO Teams. The training sessions were conducted across UNAMI regional Hubs in Basra, Erbil and Kirkuk. DSO played a crucial role in facilitating and hosting these trainings attended by UNAMI and UN agencies staff operating in the respective hubs. The trainings, led by both the UN climate change advisor at the DSRSG/RC/HC office and the UNAMI Climate Change, Peace and Security Advisor aimed at enhancing awareness and preparedness. Other climate change activities included the finalisation of three papers on the water situation in Anbar, Dyala and Salahudin. Furthermore, DSO carried out a field mission to Kalar Garmyan in KRI in November to assess the situation of water scarcity following reports of climate change displacements. The mission revealed that 17 villages and 100 families were adversely affected by drought in the summer of 2023, prompting farmers to migrate to urban centers. Subsequently, some have since returned due to increased rainfall in November.

In response to the scaling down of humanitarian activities in Iraq, DSO stepped up its involvement in the humanitarian portfolio, highlighting the residual humanitarian needs. DSO maintained engagement with local authorities overseeing the humanitarian efforts and visited two IDP camps in Dohuk and Erbil to assess the overall conditions there. In collaboration with the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), DSO facilitated dialogue on humanitarian issues, addressing deficiencies and gaps through humanitarian transition briefs shared with the HCT. Starting October 2023, DSO provided bi-monthly reports on climate-induced displacement in the south, and detailing figures of returnees and IDPs in Kirkuk, along with any associated humanitarian issues. Over 80 meetings were conducted with key partners, local government, UN agencies and NGOs, local community, leaders, and private sector, covering SDGs, climate change, humanitarian needs, develop-

ment strategies, as well as Resilience and Recovery initiatives.

DSO, in partnership with OCHA and with other UN agencies and non-governmental organizations, mapped out activities and the presence of UN/INGO initiatives in Kurdistan region. A total of 375 activities and 60 partners were identified. Info-graphic maps were produced and shared with local government authorities and humanitarian/development partners. This tool is vital to support the coordination of development assistance and delivery of humanitarian aid in the Kurdistan region.

DSO has been a driving force in facilitating critical missions across regions. Notably, it organized and facilitated two SRSR missions, and two DSRSG/RC/HC missions, and supported the DSRSG Political and the High Commissioner for Human Rights visits to the south. DSO also extended support to the non-resident agencies of UNEP, IFAD and UNHCR missions to the south. Engaging with International Non-Government Organisations (INGO)s planning activities in the south, DSO provided essential support; organized information and facilitated their missions and meetings. In Erbil, Dohuk and Mosul, DSO facilitated and coordinated five DSRSG/HC/RC missions, and offered similar support to UNEP field missions to Mosul, Kirkuk, and Baghdad in January. DSO constantly supported to the Operations Management Team (OMT)'s retreat in Erbil, as well as the UNCT retreat in Sulaymaniyah. In North and Central regions, DSO facilitated and coordinated DSRSG, UNEP and IOM missions, and supported organizing 14 technical meetings between relevant departments in Kirkuk and counterparts, and the UN Development System (UNEP, UNHCR, UNDP, IOM, and UNICEF). In Anbar, DSO actively participated in and co-facilitated the Peace Conference sponsored by UNDP and the Danish Government. Additionally, it also co-facilitated the UNDP-sponsored Conference on Confronting Extreme Violence and the Role of Youth in Community Integration and Coexistence.



## Unmasking ISIL's Chemical Weapons Program: Inside UNITAD's Investigations of ISIL's Development and Use of Chemical Weapons

**O**n October 31, 2023, UNITAD handed over a landmark investigative report to the Iraqi Judiciary on ISIL's Chemical Weapons Crimes in Iraq. The report encompassed the findings into the development and use of chemical weapons by ISIL in Iraq. This comprehensive legal report came after three years of tireless work of UNITAD's field investigative unit focusing on ISIL's development and use of chemical weapons in Iraq and the attack on the town of Taza Khurmatu on 8 March 2016.

The weaponization efforts of ISIL were far-reaching. They focused on the usage of sulfur mustard, chlorine, and aluminum phosphate, delivered

through mortars, rockets, and improvised explosive devices (IED's). The sophistication of these delivery systems underscores the severity of ISIL's intent to inflict widespread harm, showcasing the gravity of ISIL's objectives. According to UNITAD's investigations, the collected evidence indicated that ISIL had been conducting medical experimentations and testing chemical agents on animals and human beings. The ISIL operatives working in the testing environments administered ricin, nicotine and sulphur to animal and human subjects such as that in the case of al Qaim; and nicotine toxin and thallium sulfate that was found to have been tested on humans in Mosul. These

experimentations and fatal testing were conducted to determine accurate dosages and calculate product output.

In the devastating case of Taza Khurmatu attack, perpetrated by ISIL on 8 March 2016, the group deployed 42 projectiles at the town, which had around 35,000 inhabitants. Among these, at least 27 projectiles contained Sulfur Mustard, a chemical agent scheduled under the Chemical Weapons Convention. UNITAD uncovered that the attack was ordered at the highest levels of ISIL leadership with the intent of causing maximum casualties against the Shia Turkmen inhabitants. This incident, alongside other atrocious crimes in which ISIL specifically targeted the Shia



in Iraq, may indicate a pattern reflecting ISIL's genocidal intent against the Shia community; a legal question which the Team planned to further investigate.

The inquiry into ISIL crimes against the Shia Turkmen of Taza Khurmatu extended beyond this attack only, meticulously seeking forensic, documentary, and testimonial evidence to navigate legal intricacies. The investigation indicated that this was not an isolated, single incident in the use of chemical weapons but rather on the contrary, showed that ISIL - drawing on its violent ideology - purposefully advanced chemical warfare capabilities, successfully combined certain agents with delivery systems, and deployed chemical weapons against military and civilian targets across Iraq. Special Adviser Christian Ritscher iterated that "UNITAD's line of investigation into ISIL's development and use of chemical weapons is ground-breaking and sets the sediments for unprecedented judicial avenues and the Team will spare no effort to support bringing those responsible for such heinous crimes to justice." Also stating that "UNITAD will spare no effort in working towards this goal, precisely when atrocity crimes such as the development and use of

chemical weapons are at stake."

As part of its mandate, UNITAD conducts structural investigations into ISIL crimes against all affected Iraqi communities. Early 2023, Special Adviser Ritscher visited the town of Taza Khurmatu, and met competent investigative judges working on ISIL crimes in the town, as well as several officials, community leaders and survivors. He was briefed on the long-term repercussions of this brutal crime on Iraqi civilians in the area, and the survivors' quest for accountability and justice.

Key findings of UNITAD's investigations also highlighted ISIL's development of at least eight chemical agents, including three toxins prohibited by the Biological Weapons Convention of 1972. Moreover, the investigation revealed that the development and production of ISIL's own weapons and ammunition were centralized under the supervision of the Committee of Military Development and Manufacturing (CMDM). This committee, falling under the ISIL Department of Defense established in late 2014, had a monthly regular budget exceeding \$1 million, along with additional funds for raw material procurement. Payroll records

for the CMDM indicated that over 1,600 ISIL members were involved in weapon production, with hundreds engaged in the chemical weapons research and development program.

In June 2023, UNITAD presented on its findings pertinent to this line of investigation, at a special event co-hosted by UNITAD, Iraq, and India at the headquarters of the United Nations.

UNITAD's investigation not only exposes the reality of ISIL's chemical weapons program but also emphasizes the necessity of addressing these crimes within the robust framework of international criminal law. The findings provide a foundation for accountability and justice, acknowledging the gravity of offenses committed against humanity. The stark reality of this program in research and development, manufacturing logistics, and the deployment of weapons, underscores the gravity of the threat posed by non-state actors in today's world conflicts, making it necessary, and essential to continue with thorough and comprehensive investigations until the true magnitude of ISIL crimes is uncovered.



## A Triumph for Accountability Efforts: How Iraq and UNITAD supported Portugal's First Conviction for International Crimes

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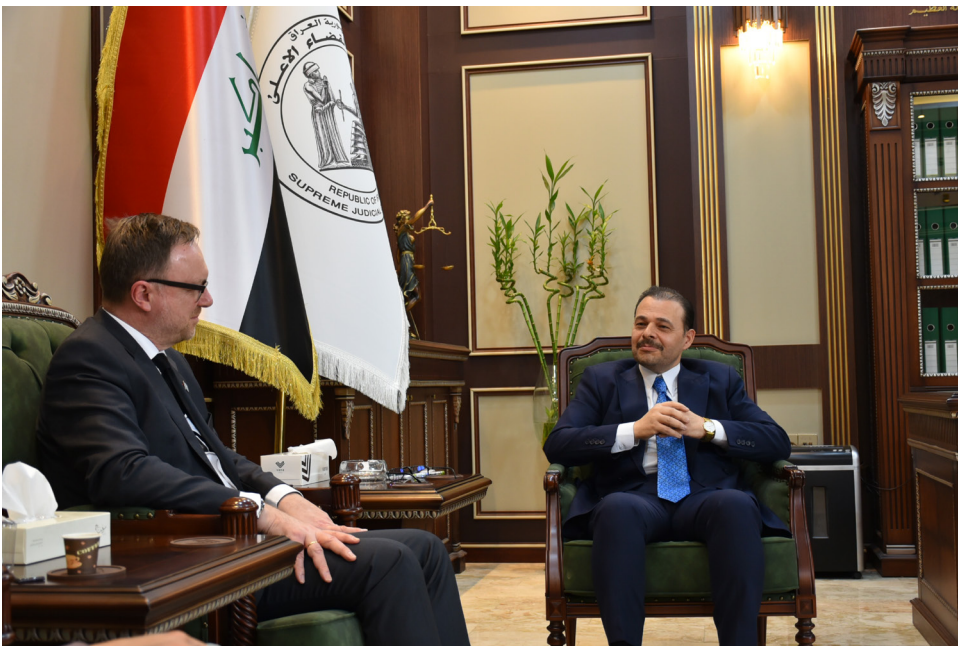
**The Iraqi Judiciary and the Team have been extending crucial support to accountability processes in third states with competent jurisdictions to prosecute international crimes committed by ISIL in Iraq**

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In a significant stride towards justice, the United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh/ISIL (UNITAD) welcomed Portugal's recent landmark conviction of an ISIL member, after being charged for international crimes committed in Iraq.

The ISIL perpetrator, A.A., an Iraqi national who fled to Europe, was charged of committing war crimes, in Mosul, Iraq, for the

kidnapping and whipping of an Iraqi citizen. The perpetrator was additionally convicted, along with his brother Y.A. of membership in a terrorist organization (ISIL). "This ruling is Portugal's first conviction of a perpetrator on charges of war crimes. It marks a milestone along the path made possible thanks to the unique partnership between UNITAD and Iraq. The Iraqi Judiciary and the Team have been extending crucial support to



accountability processes in third states with competent jurisdictions to prosecute international crimes committed by ISIL in Iraq," said Special Adviser and Head of UNITAD, Christian Ritscher.

In 2020, UNITAD received the request for assistance from the General Public Prosecutor's Office in Portugal and, in response, led an investigation in close cooperation with Judge Raed al-Mosleh, now President of the Nineveh Federal Appeals Court. This resulted in identifying 13 victims and witnesses whom the Team interviewed as prosecution witnesses. UNITAD facilitated for the witnesses to testify -while in Duhok- through video conferencing during the pretrial before the Portuguese judge, prosecutor, and defense lawyer. Afterwards, Judge Raed Al-Mosleh also facilitated for the defense witnesses to testify remotely, during the proceedings, from his courthouse in Mosul, which was the first time for the Iraqi judiciary to arrange remote witness testimonies using video conferencing. In addition, UNITAD's lead investigator gave a key expert testimony during the trial before the Portuguese court.

"We are extremely proud of our joint pursuit on this case with Honorable Judge Raed Al Mosleh, which led to this landmark conviction. It exemplifies the meaningful work of UNITAD together with the Iraqi judiciary as a partner that supports evidence-based justice pro-

cesses in Iraq and throughout the world," stressed Special Adviser Ritscher.

This work has been possible thanks to the solid support and continued cooperation between UNITAD and the Iraqi Supreme Judicial Council, headed by Chief Justice Dr. Faiq Zaidan, President of the Supreme Judicial Council. The Team has been working together with competent Iraqi judges to ensure the proper preservation of evidence for ISIL crimes in accordance with the highest international standards. Moreover, the continued work with the Iraqi judiciary to build joint case files against ISIL perpetrators has been an important step forward on the path of accountability and meaningful justice, supporting prosecutions throughout the world.

In his recent briefing to the United Nations Security Council in December of 2023, Special Adviser Ritscher highlighted UNITAD's instrumental role in supporting third state investigations and prosecutions as "this ensures that the gap in global accountability does not expand." To date, the Team has supported requests for assistance from 20 third states with competent jurisdictions to prosecute ISIL international crimes in Iraq. This demand for third states support has grown exponentially over the past years.

This conviction in Portugal is the latest in a growing list of convictions in third states resulting from UNITAD's support

to prosecutions, in cooperation with the Iraqi judiciary. So far, the Team has supported 17 cases in third state jurisdictions that were under investigation and led to indictments. 15 of these cases ended up in convictions of ISIL members or affiliates.

In 2021, the first conviction of ISIL member for committing genocide against the Yazidis was issued by the Higher Regional Court in Frankfurt, Germany. ISIL member, Taha Al-J was found guilty of war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide following a 19-months trial. Other significant convictions, which UNITAD's support contributed to, include, a conviction by the Swedish district court in 2022 of

an ISIL female member for her failure to protect her 12 years old son, from being recruited and used as child soldier by ISIL. Also, in June 2023, the German Higher Regional Court of Koblenz convicted an ISIL female member, Nadine K., a German national who was found guilty of aiding and abetting genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes for the enslavement and abuse of a young Yazidi woman in Iraq. The Yazidi victim, who was enslaved by the ISIL couple for 3 years, participated in the case as a plaintiff, and thus, witnessed her day in court.

It is important to note that prosecutions for international crimes allow for the meaningful participation of victims in criminal proceedings. This focuses on the centrality of victims and survivors. Such prosecutions recognize the suffering of the victims and allow for their voices to be heard, through evidence-based trials that establish the truth of ISIL's heinous crimes.

"This remains a core objective of UNITAD's work," said Special Adviser Ritscher adding that "the Team will exert every possible effort to ensure that the fruitful partnership with the Iraqi judiciary yields its desired results in successful prosecutions that lead to convictions on charges of international crimes. This is a common goal for the UN, for Iraq, for third states as well as for the thousands of Iraqi victims and survivors."



## FAO Iraq is dedicated to supporting the 2030 Agenda



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*In close collaboration with the Government of Iraq and partners, FAO is committed to developing sustainable agrifood systems in Iraq. Working hand in hand, we are striving to leave no one behind and to build a resilient and prosperous future for the country's agriculture. Emphasizing better production, better nutrition, a better environment, and better life, our focus extends to the interconnected challenges and opportunities within Iraq's agricultural landscape.*

**FAO Iraq Representative, Dr Salah El Hajj Hassan**

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**F**AO Iraq is dedicated to supporting the 2030 Agenda through the transformation to MORE efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable agrifood systems for better production, better nutrition, a better environment, and a better life, leaving no one behind.

In January 2023, Iraq joined the FAO Hand-in-Hand Initiative which supports the implementation of nationally led, ambitious programmes to accelerate agrifood systems transformations by eradicating poverty (SDG1), ending hunger

and malnutrition (SDG2), and reducing inequalities (SDG10). It uses advanced geospatial modeling and analytics, as well as a robust partnership-building approach to accelerate the market-based transformation of agrifood systems — to increase incomes, improve the nutritional status and well-being of poor and vulnerable populations, and build resilience to climate change, supporting three major value chains (date palm, tomato, and dairy).

Iraq also joined the FAO Global Action on

One Country One Priority Product (OCOP) focusing on diversification, unlocking untapped potential of agricultural products, and identifying and addressing gaps in the targeted value chain: date palm.

Sustainable agricultural practices in Iraq and the role of the government in supporting food system transformation from policy, technological and financial perspectives, were part of the dialogue led by FAO during COP 28.

With technical assistance from FAO and support from the Food Systems Coordi-





*"Thanks to FAO's help, our buffalo breeding in the southern Iraqi marshes has seen remarkable improvements. The new feeding techniques introduced by FAO have not only significantly improved the health of our animals, resulting in better milk quantity and quality, but have also reduced the cost of buying feed. Your support is having a positive impact on our livelihoods."*

**Abdul Amir Jabbar Hammadi - Buffalo Breeder**

nation Hub, the Government of Iraq developed its National Pathway for Agrifood Systems Transformation. This effort led to Iraq's submission of its Voluntary Progress Report in 2023, which outlined a comprehensive strategy aimed at increasing food accessibility, boosting agricultural production, engaging the private sector, and addressing climate change and reforestation plans. FAO's impactful initiatives demonstrate a commitment to achieving a more resilient food system and offering substantial job opportunities for rural communities in southern Iraq.

In July 2023, FAO, in partnership with the Iraqi Government, initiated a call for action to develop a robust Emergency Plan for buffalo producers in the southern Iraqi marshes. The Government responded with substantial funding of 5 billion Iraqi dinars to support the Emergency Plan for buffalo breeders. FAO Iraq actively monitored the implementation of the emergency plan and provided expertise. This funding underscores the shared com-

mitment of the Government of Iraq and FAO to the well-being of communities and the conservation of the Iraqi World Natural Heritage site.

These efforts aim to support some 15,000 buffalo breeders and their 264,000 buffalos.

FAO Iraq aims to create economic opportunities for livestock-based vulnerable rural households, particularly women, through the creation of small-holder dairy farmer groups engaged in sustainable, climate-smart, efficient, competitive, and profitable livestock activities. Supported by funding from the European Union (EU), farmers have been empowered to enhance dairy production practices, including improving hygiene and food safety in dairy processing, as well as optimizing animal feeding practices through local climate-smart fodder cultivation and the use of local strategic feed supplements such as sugar molasses.

FAO's unwavering commitment to reversing the land degradation process in Southern Iraq is evident through

*"Thanks to FAO's support, the introduction of fully equipped milk processing caravans has been a game changer for the women in our community. This initiative not only empowers us, but also opens new economic opportunities, contributing to the growth and sustainability of our region."*

**Faliha Hassan, Buffalo breeder and dairy producer**

the support provided to 2,500 farmers through the GEF-funded project, emphasizing Farmer Field Schools (FFS) for Sustainable Land Management practices. Sixty extension officers have been trained as ToTs on Conservation Agriculture (CA) and Farmer Field School (FFS). 52 FFS demonstration plots have been established, serving as "Learning by Doing Centers" for training farmers on Sustainable Land Management (SLM) practices.

FAO National Project Coordinator Ali Al-Hasani: "At FAO, we are committed to combating land degradation through smart agricultural practices. By empowering communities with these effective techniques, we aim to safeguard agricultural landscapes for a sustainable future.

Under the umbrella of the One Health approach, a comprehensive training plan has been implemented to improve the delivery of animal health services and disease surveillance in Iraq. This initiative has successfully trained 700 trainers (ToTs) and 895 veterinarians across Iraq. The primary goal is to reduce the risks posed by diseases that threaten livestock production, food security, food safety, and public health. The introduction of the Event Mobile Application (EMA-i) technology has significantly improved data collection and real-time disease reporting, strengthening the capacity of veterinary services in disease surveillance.

FAO's dedication to sustainable agricultural development in Iraq is realised through robust national and international collaborations. At the national level, FAO works closely with key ministries, including Agriculture, Water Resources, Environment, and Planning, demonstrating a unified effort to address multiple challenges. Inclusive development is emphasized through partnerships with the Directorate of Women Empowerment and the Counsellors Commission at the Prime Minister's Cabinet. Internationally, partnerships with entities such as the European Union, Canada, and Sweden through SIDA, along with collaborations with Norway, GEF, GCF, and DTRA, collectively form a global network committed to addressing climate change, land degradation, and enhancing food security. These partnerships highlight FAO's unwavering commitment to achieving positive impact and fostering resilience.

This collaborative effort between FAO, the Iraqi Government, and our partners signifies our collective dedication to sustainable development, food security, and the well-being of communities across Iraq. We look forward to continued success and impactful contributions in the coming year.



## UNDP in Iraq in 2023

2023 was a significant year for Iraq on the climate change front. Marked by Iraq making history with joining the UN Water Convention with the support of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Iraq has also hosted two important conferences for the region such as the Basra Climate Conference, and the 3rd Baghdad International Water Conference. The year was crowned with Iraq's important participation in COP28 Dubai, with a first-ever Iraq pavilion that hosted over 30 sessions and hundreds of guests.

As always, UNDP was present alongside the Government of Iraq throughout all those milestones and continued its unwavering support to Iraq's sustainable development and climate action. Along with UNDP's several pivotal projects that focus on underscoring Iraq's presence on the global environmental stage, digitalizing water data management, developing

energy policies, assessing climate vulnerability, and supporting the most vulnerable Iraqi communities.

UNDP has been instrumental in supporting Iraq in its water negotiations with its neighbors and transitioning the management of water resources from manual, handwritten records to a comprehensive digital platform. The programme has also taken significant steps towards developing a roadmap for energy transition, framed within the context of the broader global climate agenda under COP28. This aims to guide Iraq towards a sustainable energy future by addressing policy development and promoting the adoption of renewable energy sources. The programme is taking a comprehensive Climate Vulnerability Assessment to gauge the country's susceptibility to climate impacts and identify strategies for enhancing climate resilience. This assessment will be crucial for downscaling

global climate models to local contexts, enabling targeted interventions.

In 2023, UNDP has also advanced its support for Iraq's efforts to eradicate corruption and promote foreign investment through its Anti-Corruption and Arbitration initiatives (ACAI), funded by the European Union. This initiative aligns with Iraq's broader economic diversification and governance enhancement goals, focusing on improving transparency, accountability, and the legislative framework against corruption. Notable achievements include the development of the draft laws on Access to Information and Arbitration, which are approved by the Council of Ministers and sent to the parliament for consideration, among other reviews and support for the adoption of critical legislation. Through the Trial Monitoring Programme, UNDP has supported courts in identifying gaps and challenges within the judicial sys-

tem in processing corruption offences. Additionally, UNDP's efforts to support parliamentary integrity and mobilize civil society have led to significant engagement in anti-corruption activities, including the #PasstheBaton campaign, which achieved over 50 million views. These comprehensive efforts underscore UNDP's commitment to reinforcing Iraq's legal and institutional capacities to combat corruption and attract foreign investment, contributing to the nation's sustainable development and economic resilience.

The Funding Facility for Stabilization (FFS) project, initiated by UNDP Iraq in mid-2015, is one of the largest efforts to rehabilitate areas affected by the ISIL conflict, with the support of the Global Coalition Against Daesh and the Government of Iraq. Operating across five liberated governorates and focusing on nine major sectors, the FFS has significantly impacted infrastructure and service availability. By the end of 2023, the project has implemented 354 electricity projects benefiting 2.7 million people, improved water access for 2.5 million through 297 projects, and enhanced the education sector with 638 projects af-



fecting 343,000 beneficiaries. In health-care, 545 projects, including 19 hospitals, have served 3.7 million individuals. Additionally, 38,000 homes have been rehabilitated for 284,000 beneficiaries, and 71 roads and bridges projects have reached 2.2 million people. The livelihoods of 77,500 individuals have been supported by 259 projects, while 340 municipal projects have benefited 3.6 million people. Furthermore, renewable energy advancements have been made through 11 projects for 111,500 benefi-

ciaries. More than 95% of the work was locally contracted, infusing the economy and ensuring community-driven rebuilding. Overall, over \$1.55 billion was mobilized from international partners for this initiative, marking a substantial investment in Iraq's recovery and stability.

Among the 2023 policy-making achievements, UNDP developed the Social Accounting Matrix in close cooperation with the Ministry of Planning which stands out as an important economic analysis tool, unveiled at the SDGs





Summit 2023. In addition to the establishment of the Women Peace Mediators Network, in partnership with the National Women's Development, that underscores UNDP's commitment to enhancing women's roles in peace mediation and ensuring their comprehensive involvement in peace efforts. Furthermore, the initiation of the National Human Development Report (NHDR) for Iraq, focusing on social contract and citizenship, reflects UNDP's dedication to engaging with key stakeholders on critical themes. Lastly, the development of the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) with Iraq's Central Statistics Organization marks a significant effort to refine poverty alleviation strategies and bolster Iraq's pursuit of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Additionally, 2023 is considered as one of the highest implementation rates in the programme, UNDP provided technical guidance and support on three strategic security sector documents: the National Security Strategy (2024-2028), the Security Sector Reform Strategy (2024-2032), and the Ministry of Interior Strategy (2024-2026), supporting the government in including women empowerment in SSR, responses of the security sector to climate change and a people-centred approach to security delivery. The programme also launched and developed Iraq's first multi-disciplinary financial investigations handbook, an assessment of Iraq's case management system for

criminal cases, the Women in the MOI study, a Model Police Stations lessons learned report, a stocktaking report of security sector roles in climate and environmental security, a programming document on environmental justice and supported the Financial Intelligence Unit of Iraq in preparing and responding to the ongoing Middle East and North Africa Financial Action Task Force mutual evaluation report.

In total, UNDP successfully strengthened the capacities of 2,303 (212 females) police officers, judges, and investigators from 11 institutions on anti-money laundering. UNDP – MoI in its cascade trainings trained also more than 2,000 police officers in 2023 and finished the piloting phase of the citizens-centred model police station concept. The Ministry of Interior endorsed the approach and upgraded two police stations to learning hubs.

UNDP's efforts in Iraq also include a Digital Transformation Project which has assessed Iraq's current digital capabilities through the Digital Landscape Assessment, that includes evaluations of digital maturity and potential accelerators or bottlenecks. This has supported the creation of a public sector digital transformation roadmap, outlining strategic e-governance priorities such as coordination, legal framework reviews, data exchange, cloud strategies, and digital skills enhancement, alongside a national capacity needs assessment. UNDP conducted a Job Matching initiative which



has successfully trained 245 young individuals, providing them with competitive labor market skills and securing long-term employment for 117 participants in the private sector, with five starting their own businesses. Meanwhile, UNDP's NGO Empowerment Project developed a module for civil society organizations to publish and fund campaigns within the local crowdfunding platform "Invest my Idea," further strengthening community development and engagement.

Finally, In 2023, UNDP's Funding Facility for Economic Reform, in collaboration with the Central Bank of Iraq and with support from the USAID, successfully provided technical assistance in reviewing and updating the legal framework for E-Payment and financial inclusion. This comprehensive review culminated in a recommendation report addressing critical legal aspects for the banking and technical sectors within electronic payment services.

UNDP has also played an important role in assisting Iraq's Ministry of Planning by nominating a cadre of experts to contribute to the National Development Plan. These experts specialize in key areas such as Demography and Gender Equality, Natural Resources and Climate Change, and Urban and Rural Development. The collaboration is in its advanced stages, with the technical assistance nearing completion, and the launch of the plan is forthcoming.

Additionally, UNDP has extended technical assistance to the International Cooperation Development Office within the Ministry of Planning. This support is designed to enhance the ICD's skills in negotiation, consultation, and the management of awards from various donors, thereby strengthening Iraq's international cooperation and developmental strategy.



# UNEP Regional Office of West Asia supports Iraq address the triple planetary crisis

In 2023, the United Nations Environment Programme continued to support Iraq in addressing the triple planetary crisis through strategic actions targeting the impact of climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution.

Throughout the year, UNEP Regional Office for West Asia offered its expertise and technical support to the government of Iraq to enable it to comply with its commitments to multi-lateral agreements, preserve and restore its biodiversity, combat pollution and enhance its governance through capacity building.

## Climate Action

### Building capacity to advance NAP process in Iraq

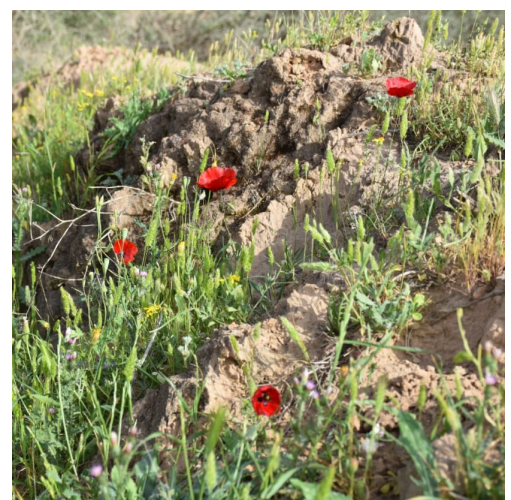
Under the Green Climate Fund (GCF), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) West Asia Office supported the Iraqi Ministry of Environment (MoE) to develop its National Adaptation Plan (NAP) to adapt to climate change impacts, and strengthen institutional, technical, and financial capacities.

This included a series of capacity building and consultation workshops.

Adaptation options have been developed for six selected governorates: Sulaimaniya, Baghdad, Najaf, Anbar, Dhi-qar and Basra targeting four priority sectors: health, agriculture, water and livelihoods based on the national climate risk assessment conducted.

During COP28, UNEP and UNDP

organized a side event in the Iraq pavilion and highlighted in a technical panel session the progress of the NAP development with specific focus on the water sector. The NAP is expected to be ready by June 2024.



## **Second National Communication (SNC), and Biennial Update Report**

UNEP is supporting Iraq develop its Second National Communication (SNC) and Biennial Update Report (BUR) which will be submitted to the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 2024. The SNC and BUR look into national circumstances, update Greenhouse Gases emissions inventory and present relevant targeted strategies for climate mitigation. They also assess climate change vulnerability of high priority sectors for adaptation within Iraq (agriculture, water, biodiversity, and health).

## **MoU with WFP**

The UN Environment Programme regional Office for West Asia and the World Food Programme office in Iraq signed a Memorandum of Understanding to tackle climate change challenges and help build resilience and reduce the vulnerabilities of communities impacted by climate change in Iraq

## **Nature Action**

In 2023, the UN Environment Programme supported the government of Iraq promote the importance of biodiversity conservation through the establishment of a protected areas network and capacity building

## **Protected Area Network (PAN)**

The United Nations Environment Programme, Regional Office for West Asia closed the Protected Area network project in June 2023 and handed it over to the Iraqi Ministry of Environment. Funded by the GEF and implemented by IUCN, the project resulted in the declaration of two protected areas (Teeb in Maysan Governorate and Dalmaj in Wasit Governorate and Al Diwanayah Governorate) in Iraq. It showcased significant progress in designing and implementing the Protected Area Network (PAN) in Iraq. It also successfully elevated public awareness and outreach efforts related to biodiversity conservation and protected areas, through three awareness raising workshops conducted (during 2023) in addition to the revamping of the ministry's website to include a newly

developed page on Protected Areas and the training of ministry's staff on managing this website

## **Biodiversity Conservation and Land Degradation Neutrality Project (GEF7)**

The 4-year project "Promotion of Integrated Biodiversity Conservation and Land Degradation Neutrality in Highly Degraded Landscapes of Iraq", funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) was launched on 4 December 2023 during CoP28 in UAE, by the minister of environment, H.E. Eng. Nizar Mohammed Saeed Amidi, in the Iraqi Pavilion. The project aims to strengthen governmental and non-governmental capacities to achieve biodiversity conservation and land degradation neutrality in the Middle Euphrates landscape through Integrated Landscape Management and will be executed by the United Nations Environment Programme, Regional office for West Asia, in partnership with the Ministry of Environment, Iraq. The two project sites are Razzaza and Sawa Lakes.

## **Pollution Action**

The office continued to support the Republic of Iraq combat pollution through contributing to the development of an integrated approach for pollution control and prevention through a comprehensive strategy and action plan.

## **Multilateral Environmental Agreements related to Chemicals and Waste**

In 2023, UNEP supported Iraq in developing its National Implementation Plan for the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants. Additionally, UNEP also supported the Minamata Initial Assessment (MIA), which outlines actions to phase down or phase out mercury-contaminated products in accordance with the Minamata Convention.

## **Capacity building**

## **"Integration of Environmental Management into Legislative, Planning, and Monitoring Processes in Iraq"**

In September 2023, UNEP West Asia Of-

fice organized a workshop titled "Integration of Environmental Management into Legislative, Planning, and Monitoring Processes in Iraq" that brought together key stakeholders involved in shaping sectoral policies and legislation in Iraq, including H.E. Dr. Majid Khalaf Mastto, Head of the parliamentary Health and Environment Committee, with five other members of parliament from the Iraq Council of Representatives, and one representative from the Iraqi Prime Minister's counsel, and six participants from the Iraqi Ministry of Environment, including Directors General from the legal and planning directorates.

The primary objective was to address the pressing need for integrating proficient environmental management practices within Iraq's processes and frameworks. Discussions focused on addressing opportunities and challenges related to planning, legislation, and monitoring processes in response to global environmental challenges.

## **Environmental Information System (EIS)**

UNEP ROWA conducted the EIS System Training workshop in Beirut, offering capacity-building for user groups in the Iraqi Ministry of Environment and Ministry of Planning. The workshop included practical sessions on EIS utilization and functionalities, along with an intensive hands-on training program for the IT Department, focusing on system operations, network management, database administration, and data input and retrieval.

## **Reporting Skills Workshop**

UNEP ROWA conducted the "Supporting MEAs and SOER Reporting Workshop" in Erbil involving key user groups from the Iraqi Ministry of Environment and Ministry of Planning. The workshop improved participants' knowledge of information sharing for Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) and State of the Environment Reports (SoER), featuring Driver-Pressure-State-Impact-Response (DPSIR) analysis for system indicator data and emphasizing its effective use in reporting through EIS for decision-makers in Iraq.



## In 2023 UN-Habitat Iraq embarked on a strategic shift in its operational focus

In 2023, UN-Habitat Iraq embarked on a strategic shift in its operational focus, transitioning from a robust emphasis on urban regeneration and “build back better” concepts to strengthening governance and enhancing the capacities of national and local authorities, with a special focus on Housing, Land, and Property (HLP) rights.

There is a critical need to assist the Government of Iraq in engaging in policy dialogue aimed at reforming the land legal framework to improve governance and access to HLP documentation, especially for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and returnees. These groups, along with the broader Iraqi population, face significant challenges in exercising

their HLP rights, including issues related to property transfer, formalization of property transactions, and acquisition of new or replacement documentation. These challenges are particularly acute in real estate registration offices across war-affected governorates, where property records have been destroyed or are outdated.

This situation underscores the urgent necessity to support vulnerable populations, from IDPs to the general public, in securing their tenure rights. Engaging in policy dialogue and discussions to reform laws and resolve land claims is crucial for facilitating durable solutions in Iraq and that is exactly where the main efforts of the organization will be set.

Despite the substantial challenges in promoting safe and sustainable returns, we remain confident in the capacity of national institutions to address Iraq’s pressing needs. These institutions can continually count on UN-Habitat Iraq for technical support and advice, whether in the reconstruction process or in refining strategies to enhance governance and ensure the rights of all Iraqis are secured, leaving no one and no place behind.

**Muslim Qazimi | Head of Country Programme**

UN-Habitat Iraq

**Email:** muslim.qazimi@un.org



# International Trade Centre in Iraq

## Interview with

## Representative, Head of Country Programme

# MR. ERIC BUCHOT

### **Please give us a brief overview of ITC's work in Iraq**

As the lead UN agency fully dedicated to the development of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs), ITC plays a crucial role in empowering Iraqi MSMEs to leverage trade opportunities. Collaborating with partners, ITC strives to enhance the competitiveness of MSMEs, offering support to foster entrepreneurship and employment prospects, with a particular focus on women, youth, marginalized and poor communities. ITC's main clients are MSMEs, business support organizations and governments.

Funded by the European Union, the 'Strengthening the Agriculture and Agri-food Value Chain and Improving Trade Policy in Iraq' (SAAVI) is ITC's flagship programme in Iraq. Throughout 2023, ITC-SAAVI project continued its contributions to inclusive economic growth and job creation, particularly for youth, by improving agricultural sector competitiveness and supporting trade development in Iraq.

### **In your view, what were ITC's greatest achievements in 2023 in Iraq?**

ITC was a key partner for Iraq, as the UN country team increasingly shifted its focus from humanitarian response to lon-

ger-term development. As the lead agency supporting private sector growth and MSMEs, ITC offers a unique value proposition in the humanitarian-development-peace nexus in Iraq. Over the past year, ITC has undertaken strategic initiatives to enhance its local presence and impact in the country. Notably, we have expanded the size of our local team, reinforcing our commitment to fostering sustainable development. Our operational footprint has grown, with established offices in Mosul and Erbil, allowing us to more effectively engage with our beneficiaries.

In 2023, key highlights of our interventions include:





### Scaling up the impact of ITC's market-driven Agribusiness Alliances

In 2022, ITC-SAAVI made significant strides in establishing productive and commercial agribusiness alliances in Iraq. Ten alliances were created, linking farmers with an unprecedented network of Iraqi buyers gathering prominent business across the country. Through farmer-small business alliances, we're creating pathways to lucrative markets while maintaining quality and competitive pricing.

These alliances serve as a catalyst for positive change. ITC-SAAVI provides MSMEs with a holistic support to empower them, offering farmers invaluable support to bolster their production capacities and

upgrade their overall business models, encompassing aspects like production techniques, quality standards, post-harvest/storage practices, and marketing strategies. ITC-SAAVI has helped these farmers' alliances develop their own local investment and business plans.

Based on these plans, ITC-SAAVI implemented ten micro-project initiatives by disbursing block grants to the agribusiness alliances. These initiatives encompassed diverse areas such as irrigation system installation, biosecurity measures, water desalination equipment, and the provision of high-quality seeds for commercial production. Preliminary analysis indicates a 25% reduction in production costs, a remarkable over 70% decrease in poultry mortality, and a projected in-

crease of over 85% in horticultural production in the upcoming season due to improved seed quality and irrigation water quality.

In parallel, ITC-SAAVI improved the technical skills of farmers, having cumulatively trained over 1,500 producers since the project's start, essentially impacting close to 11,000 individuals. Farmers reported increased yields, reduced post-harvest losses, improved product quality, and a decreased poultry mortality rate, attributing these positive outcomes to the adoption of modern farming techniques learned through the training programs.

Notably, SAAVI's agribusiness alliances have so far realized 37 successful business transactions with leading companies, such as Holland Bazar, Carrefour Iraq, and smaller retailer buying groups in Mosul. These transactions, facilitated by ITC-SAAVI account for a substantial 30 million IQD and nearly 40 tons of fresh Iraqi products. Notably, for each commercial transaction, farmers witnessed an impressive average increase of over 100% in their prices. This achievement not only underscores the effectiveness of SAAVI's market-driven approach but also signifies a substantial improvement in the economic well-being of local farmers. This work was delivered in close partnership with the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), a key partner to whom we are extremely grateful.

Implementation of National sector strategies for high-potential agri-food products

The two ITC-facilitated strategies for high potential agrifood products, (poultry and tomatoes), developed under the leadership of the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) have provided a blueprint for the sector-level interventions by the government, private sector and international agencies, particularly those involved in the EU Agri-Food Business Development Programme in Iraq.

On the basis of this success, MoA requested ITC-SAAVI for technical support to develop a sector strategy for the potato sector. Soon-to-be unveiled, the Iraq Potato Sector Strategy was formulated through an inclusive and systematic participatory approach, engaging key stakeholders from across the sector, including industry



leaders, small business owners, farmers, and public sector representatives, and development partners.

Central to the strategy's formulation was a robust methodology comprising in-depth research, detailed value chain analysis, and a wide-ranging competitiveness survey covering over 600 agricultural enterprises and insights from over 2,500 interviews with consumers and market participants. This approach was further augmented by extensive fieldwork, including observations and visits to various farms and production facilities. The resulting Potato Sector Strategy serves as a tailored, actionable compass for the sector, clearly delineating strategic priorities and culminating in a well-defined action plan and management framework.

ITC is supporting the Iraqi government during the implementation of these sector strategies through technical trainings, and advisory support and tailored tools.

Supporting young Iraqi entrepreneurs, leveraging their innovation potential to the benefit of the Iraqi economy

ITC-SAAVI has made remarkable strides in supporting young entrepreneurs through a multi-pronged approach. Working closely with selected key support organizations, over 43,000 young were reached out to raise their awareness on the opportunities held by Iraq's agrifood sector. Out of these youth, close to 4,000 received training on agri-preneurship through the SAAVI Tadreeb platform. ITC-SAAVI has further supported young graduates from the training programmed through business grants.

At the policy level, the second Youth Barometer report developed in collaboration with NRC and launched by the Ministry of Youth and Sports unveiled valuable data to uncover the needs and potential opportunities for youth engagement in the agricultural sector. Stakeholders from line ministries, pivotal support organizations, and development partners were informed and sensitized about the findings.

Technical support, partnerships with KSOs, coaching to youth-owned businesses and policy advocacy showcase a comprehensive commitment to nurturing the next generation of Iraqi agri-preneurs.



## Accelerated progress in Iraq's WTO accession process

ITC-SAAVI's technical advisory services to the Federal Customs of Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government has led to the finalization of a consolidated tariff structure as per the requirements of the World Customs Organization (WCO) and World Trade Organization (WTO). Expected to be approved in early 2024, this unified structure, based on the Harmonized System Code, represents a significant mile-



stone for the WTO accession process.

Main highlights also include continuous advisory support provided to the technical committee on Trade in Goods and the technical committee on Construction, Distribution, Environmental and Telecom services to progress on developing the initial offer on goods and services, respectively. Our resolute support for Iraq's WTO accession reflects ITC's dedication to vital economic reforms.

## What are ITC's plans for the year ahead?

In 2024, we'll kick off the year with the second edition of the Iraq National Trade

Forum, in close coordination with the Ministry of Trade and the Ministry of Agriculture, and under the sponsorship of the European Union. The forum will be held on 19 and 20 February in Baghdad, following the success of the first event, where around 150 Iraqi companies and international buyers negotiated deals and built business relationships for an estimated value of USD 2.5 million. The second edition promises to be a catalyst for new business deals, expanding business networks and collaborations among stakeholders, industry leaders, and experts, and facilitating discussions and recommending policy solutions. The event will mark the official launch of the 'By Iraqi Hands' label in support of local products consumption.

Next year, we will continue our work to strengthen the established Agribusiness alliances, empowering MSMEs and broadening their capacities. We will carry on providing dedicated support to young entrepreneurs, guiding them through the development and implementation of their business plans with tailored assistance to address their specific needs. ITC will continue its technical support to the Government towards the implementation of the sector strategies. In the area of trade policy support, we'll carry on with our technical assistance towards Iraq's WTO accession process.

I would like to finish by extending all of our partners our heartfelt thanks for their support.



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## UNHCR: Strengthening the capacity of Iraq to protect and assist displaced persons

In 2023, UNHCR focused on strengthening national ownership and enhancing the capacity of Iraqi public service providers to deliver protection and other services to refugees, on par with nationals. This included advocating for increased access of refugees to public services, promoting refugee inclusion in social protection programmes and improving refugees' access to livelihood opportunities.

Iraq hosts over 300,000 refugees and asylum-seekers, most of whom are Kurdish Syrians (over 277,000) followed by smaller numbers from Iran, Türkiye, Palestine and other countries. The majority (89.3%) reside in the KR-I. Out of the 256,000 Syrian refugees who live in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KR-I), about 64% are in urban

areas while the rest reside in nine refugee camps. Syrian refugees continue to have limited prospects to return to their country of origin in the immediate future, particularly given the ongoing insecurity and human rights and humanitarian law violations and abuse.

Refugees continue to enjoy a generally favourable protection environment, particularly in the KR-I. In 2023, progress was made with regards to refugee education through the Refugee Education Integration Policy (REIP) which is a policy adopted by the Kurdistan Regional Government's (KRG) Ministry of Education and supported by UNHCR and education partners to include refugee children and qualified refugee teachers in the public

school system. For the academic year 2023-2024, almost 50,000 Syrian refugee children enrolled in public schools in the KR-I, including preschools – an 11% increase compared to 2022.

In addition, around 400 qualified Syrian refugee teachers were able to secure employment in public schools in the KR-I. To support the implementation of the REIP, UNHCR builds schools and classrooms to create more learning spaces and provides learning materials to refugee and Iraqi children. UNHCR also supports the capacity building of teachers and parents, including in Kurdish language, to improve the quality of teaching and the learning environment.

Meanwhile, refugees continue to have

free access to health services, similar to Iraqis. In 2023, UNHCR supported the capacity-building of staff in camp-based health centres and nearby public health facilities, including through providing medicines, medical supplies and medical equipment – strengthening the national capacity and improving access to health for refugees and Iraqis.

To ensure refugees and asylum-seekers receive adequate protection, with UNHCR's support, a refugee bill that is aligned with international standards, in particular with respect to the refugee definition and a non-refoulement principle rooted in international human rights law, is being drafted and is close to finalization. In tandem, UNHCR worked with the GoI and KRG authorities to finalize the draft Administrative Instructions related to the processing of asylum claims in federal Iraq and codifying of the procedures for issuing residency permits to refugees in the KR-I; both have yet to enter into force.

The second Global Refugee Forum (GRF) which took place in Geneva, Switzerland, in December 2023, marked the first occasion where Iraq made pledges. The GoI made three commitments to: (i) enact a new refugee law that aligns with international standards; (ii) ensure continued access to basic public services for refugees; and (iii) expand the REIP from grade five to 12 by 2030. The UN Country Team in Iraq also made six pledges to support the GoI with: (i) including refugees in the Social Safety Net; (ii) providing quality public services both inside and outside refugee camps; (iii) conducting needs assessment related to refugee and stateless populations; (iv) enhancing refugee economic inclusion; (v) expanding the REIP; and (vi) preventing and reducing statelessness.

Iraq also has over 1 million internally displaced persons (IDPs), of whom some 160,000 live in 23 IDP camps in the KR-I. In 2023, UNHCR continued supporting authorities to promote favourable conditions for solutions for IDPs including through facilitating their access to civil documentation and promoting their inclusion in Iraq's social protection systems. UNHCR intensified collaboration with the



GoI's Mol to facilitate access to civil documentation for IDPs and IDP returnees who might have lost or had their documents destroyed during displacement or who did not have an opportunity to obtain them previously due to various constraints. Particularly, support was given to IDPs and IDP returnees that cannot easily obtain their core civil documents through regular procedures.

Over the past five years, UNHCR and partners helped these communities secure over 233,000 civil documents. UNHCR and partners also coordinated with the Mol/Civil Affairs Directorate to conduct 50 mobile missions across the country to process civil document applications. In 2023, around 17,000 individuals attended legal awareness sessions on the importance of civil documentation and the application processes. UNHCR and partners provided individual legal counselling services to over 51,000 persons for the purposes of accessing civil documentation, including some 5,600 individuals with 'complex cases', such as those with perceived affiliations with Da'esh or missing key supporting documents. As a result, more than 45,500 civil documents were secured.

UNHCR also provided legal assistance for 88 stateless individuals to obtain nationality and 1,500 individuals at risk of statelessness to obtain core civil documents.

UNHCR advocated for the inclusion of

vulnerable IDPs in Iraq's poverty reduction programme, the Social Safety Net (SSN), for those who meet the eligibility criteria – irrespective of their location in camps, urban areas or informal settlements. In a breakthrough in early 2023, the GoI's Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA) decided to assess the 160,000 IDPs living in camps in the KR-I for enrolment in the SSN. So far, almost 32,000 Iraqi households residing in camps within the KR-I were successfully included in the SSN which has proven to be a better way of addressing IDP socio-economic vulnerabilities than humanitarian partners' cash assistance, as it provides greater, longer-term and more predictable support.

UNHCR, with UN and NGO partners, continued working with the Kurdish and Federal authorities to identify and implement dignified solutions for IDPs who are still residing in camps – based on the informed decision made by IDPs, their individual circumstances and in line with international human rights law. Years of advocacy efforts resulted in the KRG Mol's authorisation in mid-2023 for some IDPs residing in the East Mosul Camps to return to their homes in the 13 Hassan-sham villages surrounding the camps. In addition, UNHCR supported the GoI and KRG in the closures of camps in Sulaymaniyah Governorate and Garmian Administration with many IDPs able to return to Diyala and Salah-Al-Din.



# UNICEF: A promising year for children and young people

**F**or children and young people across Iraq, 2023 was a promising year. Relative political stability and improvements in the overall security situation were among the several advancements in the country. Other major milestones in the lives of children and young people included the attainment of beyond 90 per cent of immunization coverage for children under five, the highest ever in two decades; Iraq's participation in COP28 with the engagement of a group of 16 young people; the Government's commitment and signature of the Declaration on Children, Young People and Climate Action, in addition to the signing of the Action Plan to prevent the recruitment and use of children by the Popular Mobi-

lization Forces.

Yet, despite these achievements, children and young people in Iraq continued to face challenges. Climate change and water scarcity severely impacted the situation of children and young people. Being ranked as the fifth most vulnerable country to water and food shortages and extreme temperatures reflects the significant climate-associated risks faced by children, particularly girls. Poverty is another major challenge perpetuating and widening achievement gaps presenting lifelong consequences for children, while young people continue to grapple with limited job opportunities and engagement platforms.

With this complex environment, UNICEF adapted to the new and evolving policies under the relatively newly established government; the pockets of violence and instability; and a changing donor landscape due to the recent emerging regional crises and Iraq's financial profile.

In close coordination with the Government of Iraq, UNICEF and its partners worked to achieve long-term results in its five interconted Goal Areas, guided by the Convention on the Rights of the Child and aligned to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Through these five areas, UNICEF continued to drive impact results in the lives of most marginalized children and young people.

## Key results for children and young people:

### Children survive and thrive with access to quality primary healthcare:



To enable children to survive and thrive with access to quality primary health care, nurturing practices, and essential supplies, UNICEF supported the Ministry of Health in strengthening its national immunization programme. UNICEF provided technical support in developing a digital immunization platform, supported the implementation of a web-based electronic vaccine logistics management system, and built the capacity of more than 1,000 healthcare workers on interpersonal communication. Not only the immunization rates reached beyond 90 per cent, but also the total number of 'Zero dose' children, those missing out on every vaccination, was reduced by half from 120,000 to 60,000 children in 2023.

Ranked among the top 10 countries for measles outbreaks, in partnership with the WHO, UNICEF supported the Government of Iraq to provide lifesaving health services, including measles outbreak response vaccinations and cholera control intervention. More than 500,000 people in areas affected by health emergencies or at risk of experiencing outbreaks benefitted from these services.

In support of early childhood development (ECD) and the integrated management of childhood illnesses (IMCI), UNICEF provided technical and logistical support to the Ministry of Health. This included training of more than 2,500 health workers on ECD and IMCI and delivering supplies to 325 health service delivery points. As a result, almost half a million children and women benefitted from essential maternal, newborn and child health and nutrition services and 3.5 million children received Vitamin A supplementation which is a low-cost and a proven intervention to reduce all-cause mortality. Moreover, 18 million children and adolescents received iodized salt – an important micronutrient for physical growth and mental development.

### Children learn and acquire new skills for the future:



To ensure that children learn and acquire new skills for the future, UNICEF supported the Ministry of Education in implementing Iraq's 2022-2031 National Education Strategy (INES) to fulfill the country's commitment toward SDG4. Thanks to this support, more than 450,000 children, half girls, benefitted from UNICEF-supported formal and non-formal education. In addition, expanding access to learning enabled more than 158,000 most vulnerable children to continue their education. Among the most vulnerable children, the extension of the Refugee Education Integration Policy to cover grade five enabled Syrian refugee children to continue their learning in schools.

To improve the quality and access to education for children and recognizing the importance of school leadership, UNICEF also supported the Government in adopting the school-based management approach in more than 1,000 schools, reaching a quarter million students, more than 40 per cent were girls. Building on this progress, UNICEF also built the capacity of more than 2,800 new school management committee members and provided technical support to 15 Directorates of Education in developing their own Governorate Education Sector Plans.

Early childhood offers a critical window of opportunity to shape the

trajectory of a child's holistic development and build a foundation for their future. As part of these efforts, UNICEF trained more than 3,800 pre-primary and primary education teachers in early childhood education (ECE). More than 95,000 children (>40,000 girls) benefitted from improved inclusive child-focused education.

As part of the continuous efforts to move forward on the digitalization process of the education sector, and in partnership with UNESCO and the private sector, UNICEF supported the Education Management Information System (EMIS) reaching more than 4,500 schools.

UNICEF continued placing youth at the center of the education efforts, to ensure a better future for all. Aligned with the 2030 Iraq National Youth Vision's commitment to supporting young people's transition from learning to earning, and INES, UNICEF supported the integration of life skills-based education into formal education, reaching more than 45,000 adolescents. In parallel, and in partnership with the Ministry of Youth and Sports, UNICEF equipped almost 40,000 young people with the 21st century life skills and citizenship education at 24 government-supported youth centers.

## Children and young people are protected from violence, abuse, exploitation, and harmful practices:



To protect children and young people from violence, abuse, exploitation, and harmful practices; UNICEF supported the Government of Iraq to develop and strengthen policies to be aligned to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, signed by Iraq in June 1994. This included the Child Rights Act, the revision to the Child Protection Law, and amendments to the Juvenile Care Law to increase the age of criminal responsibility from 9 to 13 years.

As part of the efforts to protect children, the Action Plan signed on March 2023 commits the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and the National Committee for the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism on Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC) to put in place response and prevention mechanisms within the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) to strengthen the existing child protection framework. This framework is supported by UNICEF and the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) as co-chairs of the CAAC Country Task Force on Monitoring and Reporting, in cooperation with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict (SRSG-CAAC).

With the Government of Iraq, UNICEF also launched the first Child Data Portal to provide evidence for informed planning and implementation and to assist in monitoring the implementation of new laws

and policies in addition to budgeting for children.

Capacity of national stakeholders is key to protect children from violence. In support of the National Child Protection Strategy, UNICEF trained 1,000 social workers on mental health and psychosocial support, reaching almost 300,000 individuals. In the field, UNICEF also supported the most vulnerable children, including those in detention, those lacking civil documentation and birth registration, and returnees. As part of the policies supporting the future of most vulnerable children, UNICEF supported the Government in developing a child assessment mapping with a diversion plan and child-friendly court procedures to limit the detention of children and promote alternatives to detention as well as fair treatment of children in the justice system.

The focus of UNICEF remained on reaching those most in need. Over 4,700 children (645 girls) in detention centers benefitted from UNICEF-supported juvenile justice services and over 2,380 children/juveniles (540 girls) were released. Furthermore, more than 5,750 children had their births registered with UNICEF support. Also, a total of 7,050 conflict-affected children (2,820 girls), benefitted from reintegration services in areas of return and 3,000 children and families in Jeddah Rehabilitation Center were integrated into the communities.

## Children have access to equitable water, sanitation and hygiene services and supplies, and live in a safe and sustainable climate and environment;



To ensure that children have access to equitable water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services and supplies, and live in a safe and sustainable climate and environment; UNICEF supported the Government of Iraq in producing evidence to inform decision-making processes. This included the publishing of the Climate Landscape for Children and Young People, while the findings from the Social Sector Financing Review for Iraq helped identify financial gaps to achieve the Sustainable Development Goal 6 targets and the development of the costed plan. Led by the Government, UNICEF and its partners supported the participation of 16 young people (6 girls) in COP28 through a systematic and inclusive process led by the government.

Regarding UNICEF work on access to services, over 1.6 million people, including 758,000 children, benefitted from increased access to safe water and sanitation services. In addition, a tripartite partnership between the Government, the private sector, and UNICEF resulted in establishing solar-powered systems within 290 schools, 25 healthcare facilities as well as 400 government buildings.

To advance the knowledge and skills of young people, UNICEF raised awareness and built the skills of children and young people on water, climate change, and sustainable energy. These efforts included almost 2,000 female students, who were informed on menstrual hygiene management, and over 53,000 children and young people trained on solar-powered systems in schools. To ensure sustainability, the importance of renewable energy and its impact on lowering carbon footprint was integrated into the school curricula.

For refugees, internally displaced people, and returnees, UNICEF supported the transition to government-owned WASH responses. More than 30,000 people, including 13,258 children, gained access to safe water sanitation services and received hygiene supplies.

### **Children have access to inclusive social protection and to live free from poverty:**

To support children's access to inclusive social protection and to live free from poverty, and as part of the EU-UN joint programme with ILO and WFP, UNICEF supported the development of the draft social protection strategy. As part of these efforts, three comprehensive reports were developed to advocate for the delivery of government-led social services and reallocation of domestic spending towards more effective services for children. In addition, an investment case on early childhood development (ECD) to support ongoing sectoral reform was completed. The ECD investment case showed that access to quality early childhood education programmes can reduce major inequalities that young children face and can accelerate progress towards the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 4.2.

As part of its capacity building efforts and

in support of public financing for Children (PF4C), UNICEF trained 105 government officials on child-focused budgeting for improved budget management of social sectors towards equitable distribution of resources.

In alignment to UNICEF's commitment to creating a sustainable framework that empowers and integrates children and young people with disabilities into societal systems, UNICEF finalized a comprehensive children and young people with disabilities situation analysis. In addition, a management information system was established geared towards the Persons with Disability Commission and social behavioural change interventions centred on disability inclusion were designed to promote inclusivity for children living with disabilities.

A major milestone was the adoption of the new Social Security Law for Private Sector Workers and considerable efforts were invested in capacity building and awareness raising to build knowledge and consciousness around social security.

In line with all these results, UNICEF continued to position itself as the leading advocate and voice for children in Iraq while enhancing its supporter's engagement, engaging with more than 58 million people through its social media platforms.

## Way forward:



UNICEF will continue to support the government to realize its commitments to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Sustainable Development Goals.

Coordination mechanisms for children in the country to meet children's needs will continue to be supported at the highest level. This includes close collaboration with the Child Welfare Commission and others to transition to ensure child-friendly systems are in place that serve the best interests of children.

Future work will focus on upstream advocacy for increased public and private financing for children. To strengthen private sector engagement, UNICEF will need to systematically work toward defining business models that promote corporate social responsibility and demonstrate implementation of the unenforced regulations on private sector social responsibility.

UNICEF will also continue to provide quality investments in systems strengthening and will continue to position itself as the technical leader when it comes to child rights issues. Continued support to optimized data and evidence generation and use will be provided while linking various ministries' databases in support of the most vulnerable children and young people.







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## UNESCO's activities in Iraq

**UNESCO's flagship initiative not only focused on reviving the city's landmarks but also on developing youth capabilities, creating job opportunities, supporting the cultural aspect**

In the heart of Mosul, a city heavily affected by conflict—conflict that generated thousands of tons of rubble and impacted the city's social and cultural fabric—there emerged a beacon of hope: the “Revive the Spirit of Mosul” Initiative, led by UNESCO with generous financial support from the UAE, EU, and other partners, in close cooperation with the Iraqi government.

UNESCO's flagship initiative not only focused on reviving the city's landmarks but also on developing youth capabilities, creating job opportunities, supporting the cultural aspect, and working to enhance the human dimension, which represents the most important part. Over 5,000 individuals from Mosul received employment opportunities. 1,500 young men and women were trained and equipped with technical and vocational skills and provided em-

ployment to actively contribute to the city's reconstruction. The project's beneficiaries extended beyond employed youth to encompass over 600 families and individuals, including families returning to their heritage homes rebuilt by UNESCO, deepening their connection to the city, reviving and revitalizing the life and liveliness of the alleys of this ancient urban center once again.

“Reconstruction will succeed, and Iraq

will regain its influence only if the human dimension is given priority; education and culture are the key elements. They are forces of unity and reconciliation.” - Audrey Azoulay, Director-General of UNESCO

The once-vibrant streets, now marred by the remnants of war, witnessed the stirrings of renewal. Among the ruins, a group of diverse individuals united by a common purpose began a journey to rebuild not just the physical structures but also the human spirit.

Mustafa Mohammed, a 27-year-old artisan, stands as a key figure, crafting a future for the ancient city from the remnants of its past. For the past year, the



rhythmic clinks of his tools have echoed through the halls of Al-Nouri Mosque, where he has become a versatile craftsman, adept in blacksmithing, sculpting, and maneuvering colossal machinery.

Al-Nouri Mosque, standing tall as a cultural, tourist, and religious icon, is more than just a workplace for Mustafa—it's a testament to the resilience of Mosul. With an ancient history etched into its walls, the mosque is a proud canvas that Mustafa contributes to daily. Working amidst the whispers of history, he finds solace in being a part of a restoration that goes beyond bricks and mortar—it's about restoring the soul of a city.

As he gazes upon the age-old stones, Mustafa envisions a future where he can share the tales of his craftsmanship with his children. Al-Nouri Mosque, with its grandeur and significance, becomes a legacy—a story passed down through generations. Mustafa yearns for the day when he can bring his children here, point to the walls he helped reconstruct, and say, "This is our mark on history, a collaboration with UNESCO that brought light to Mosul once more."

In a remarkable manifestation of empowerment and resilience, Sarah Ahmed, a TVET graduate, carved her own path in the city's revival. Armed with her carpentry skills honed through rigorous vocational training, Sarah defied traditional norms and opened her own carpentry shop amidst the echoes

of reconstruction. Her determination and craftsmanship not only added a unique dimension to Mosul's restoration but also served as an inspiration for other women in the community, breaking barriers and forging a new narrative of female entrepreneurship in the city's rejuvenation. As the rhythmic hum of her tools blended with the symphony of reconstruction, Sarah became a living testament to the transformative power of skill and determination in rebuilding not just structures but also shattered perceptions.

In this harmonious convergence of narratives, Mustafa's and Sarah's stories intertwines with that of Engineer Raya Issa Thanoun, a distinguished leader overseeing transformative initiatives in the city. Holding the professional designation of Engineer & Supervisor of Vocational Training, her responsibilities transcend the ordinary, positioning her as a crucial orchestrator of the city's revival.

Under her stewardship, meticulous coordination and supervision define her daily endeavors, overseeing vocational training activities integral to the revitalization project

funded by the European Union and facilitated by UNESCO. In tandem, she maintains a continuous dialogue with the Department of Labor and Social Affairs, facilitating the preparation and invitation of candidates aspiring to partake in the transformative training programs.

Beyond the confines of her professional role, Engineer Thanoun's connection to the "Revive the Spirit of Mosul" project is deeply personal. As a native of Mosul, every alley and structure of the city resonates with her on a historical and cultural level, emphasizing the profound significance of the endeavor she leads.

For Engineer Thanoun, each act of restoration is a custodial commitment to Mosul's resilient heritage, a heritage she reveres in the face of an era marked by the erosion of cultural legacies. Her role takes on a greater purpose—a conscientious preservation of the essential character of Mosul, especially with the nature of the project, offering opportunities to women who, having grappled with the aftermath of conflict, emerge as beacons of strength and resilience. The project transcends mere physical reconstruction for her, encapsulating the empowerment and rejuvenation of lives in the aftermath of adversity.

Today, Engineer Raya Issa Thanoun, Sarah Ahmed and Mustafa Mohammed and scores of beneficiaries are actively contributing to the chapters of the tale of Mosul's revival—a city resurrected through determination, skill, and a shared commitment of its people to revive and preserve its heritage.





## UNIDO in Iraq

### The Revitalization of the Traditional Food Industry for Enhanced Food Security in Iraq



The United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) plays a vital role in promoting poverty eradication, resilient industries, and

inclusive societies in Iraq toward achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In 2023, UNIDO renewed its partnership with the Government of Japan in

business support for refugees and their host communities in Iraq through commencing a new joint project, "Emergency livelihood support to mitigate the food insecurity crisis among vulnerable people in Iraq". The ongoing project aims to address the critical issue of food insecurity by revitalizing the traditional food processing industry in Nineveh and Duhok Governorates and empowering communities to tackle income challenges and rising food costs. The primary focus is to elevate domestic and household-level food production, striving to facilitate a shift from mere subsistence to self-reliance.

Integral to this is women's economic empowerment. The project offers tailored resources like specialized training, tools, equipment, and extension services for women active in agriculture and food processing and preservation. A focus on women aligns with Iraq's broader rural development strategy, aiming to improve the lives of vulnerable groups, particularly women in Nineveh and Duhok Governorates.

## Building the Capacity of Government Officials Promoting Food Safety and Hygiene through Comprehensive Training

UNIDO, in coordination with Iraq's Ministry of Industry and Minerals and the Kurdistan Regional Government's (KRG) Ministry of Planning, conducted two training courses on food safety and hygiene with an attendance of 32 government officials from the Ministries of Health, Agriculture, and Industry. The active participation of the multiple ministries in the training reflected the government's priority on promoting and advancing the micro, small, and medium enterprise (MSME) sector and the importance of food safety and hygiene in business and economic development.

## Enhancing MSMEs' Food Safety and Hygiene through Training and Equipment Support

UNIDO also conducted the Safety and Hygiene Training Program tailored for MSMEs in Bartella and Bardarash Districts. The program was crafted to empower local businesses with the necessary expertise and skills to ensure workplace safety, maintain stringent hygiene standards, and thrive in the highly competitive business environment. The training brought together 30 selected MSMEs, serving as a platform for the dissemination of technical knowledge, skills, and networking. Their businesses cover a broad spectrum of products and services, mirroring the economic landscape of the region. Primarily focused on dairy food processing and other food-related enterprises, the participating MSMEs contribute significantly to the local economy.

The training comprehensively addressed crucial aspects of food and dairy production. This encompassed workplace hygiene and safety, personal hygiene, safe handling practices for food and dairy, essential equipment, the significance of temperature control, efficient packaging and storage management, and quality control of products.

Furthermore, the training also introduced business management techniques, including those for optimizing staff allocation, implementing rigorous financial management procedures, managing employee relations, and developing strategies for effective pro-

Led by esteemed food safety experts from the Quality Control Department under the Ministry of Industry, the training looked at various aspects of food handling, processing, storage, and contamination. The comprehensive training strengthened the officials' understanding and skills, providing the tools and knowledge required to enhance food safety, hygiene, and quality. Acquainted with the highest food safety standards and guidelines, they are better equipped to provide extension services and share best practices with food service establishments, facilitating greater compliance with industry regulations.

motion and marketing. Such business acumen is expected to help the participants gain a competitive edge in the market.

A significant number of the business proprietors expressed a need for new or supplementary machinery and equipment to facilitate the expansion and development of their dairy-producing enterprises. UNIDO is committed to supplying vital equipment to contribute to their business growth, thereby supporting the traditional food industry and increasing food security.

## Restoring the Local Economy through Supporting Household Dairy Production

The project also supported household producers with training, tools, and equipment. Forty-six women household producers participated in dairy training aimed at diversifying rural economic activities, supporting income generation, and fostering the self-sufficiency of families engaged in dairy production. In addition to serving as outlets for individuals seeking economic opportunities and entrepreneurship, small-scale dairy-production businesses are key to creating employment opportunities for unemployed women and youth. The training participants were provided technical assistance, hygiene practice, and entrepreneurial skills to increase their product quality and maximize marketing potential and opportunities. Additionally, the project provided them with a complete set of required processing tools and equipment. Additionally, the project provided them with a complete set of required processing tools and equipment to upscale or start up their businesses.





# UNMAS activities in Iraq

Interview with

Chief Mine Action Programme, UNMAS Iraq

MR. PEHR LODHAMMAR

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**In 2023, UNMAS Iraq was able to continue to support the Iraqi Government and national operators to prevent indiscriminate casualties and reduce the impact from explosive ordnance amongst the most vulnerable populations**”

**What have been the main achievements of UNMAS Iraq in 2023?**

For UNMAS Iraq, the number one achievement in 2023 was that our Partnership Model came to a successful conclusion in December. After three years of collaboration with international and national non-governmental organizations (INGOs and NNGOs) working together under close support and monitoring from UNMAS, we have as a team, ensured that there are two fully national, localized, very capable, and motivated mine action NNGOs available in the sector. To make this even a greater success story, the operational teams

consist of women and men working alongside each other in operational roles. I am very proud of the fact that we now have almost 28 percent of women in operational and technical positions working in the mine action sector. We have come a long way over the last seven years. This would not have been possible without funding from international donors and the very close cooperation between the INGOs and NNGOs. A big well done to all of us for this achievement! Now we must build on this achievement and success and make sure that Iraqi NNGOs also are funded in going forward.



Another important achievement is the continued, and enhanced, technical support to the Government of Iraq (GoI) in developing national mine action standards based on the international mine action standards. This is important to ensure that the mine action sector has standards that promote safe, cost-effective mine action activities in the communities where it is the most needed. I also want to say thank you to the GoI for having prioritized the development of standards. This is important!

Another success in 2023 was that we shared one of our experiences with the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen (OSESGY). Since 2017 UNMAS Iraq has trained 1822 Iraqi women and men police officers to become Explosive Hazard Management First Responders. This is a one-week training course enables them to identify explosive hazards, warn their communities, and report the hazards. In 2023, following discussions with the OSESGY, our Iraqi instructors, normally working at the Iraqi Ministry of Interior (MoI) police training school at Salman Pak outside Baghdad, travelled to Amman, where they trained 18 women and men Yemenis from, amongst others, civil society, to become first responders. The training also included an instructors specific training so they, back in Yemen, can train additional first responders.

Last but not least, UNMAS supported the capacity development of national operators and delivered explosive ordnance risk education (EORE), to ensure that Iraqis can mitigate the risk of explosive ordnance (EO) accidents and inci-

dents. In June 2023, based on a request from the Directorate for Mine Action (DMA) under the Ministry of Environment (MoE), UNMAS Iraq issued an EORE report on exploring a people-centered approach called “A Social Behavioural Change Communication Study and Strategy.” DMA and the Iraqi Kurdistan Mine Action Authority (IKMAA) will use it as they transition EORE methodology from raising awareness to promoting positive behaviour when encountering EO. Casualties have been rising in Iraq in recent years as refugees and IDPs return to their homes and economic opportunities are pursued. In December 2023, a follow-up study was completed in which an implementation plan was presented.

### **What does the Mine Action sector need to do to make itself more efficient and effective?**

Iraqi mine action stakeholders, including Government entities, have an incredible experience from everything related to mine action, including survey and clearance, destruction of stockpiles, EORE, and victim assistance. Dedicated and sustainable government funding allocation is critical to mine action in Iraq. In a sector, and world, with competing priorities for funding, the Iraqi Government should not expect the same level of international funding as in the past, and at the same time a lot of work remains to make Iraq free from the torment of unexploded ordnance from conflicts back to the Iran-Iraq war. Government funding, in the hundreds of millions of USD, must be made available and prioritized at least for the coming decade,

but probably longer, to achieve an Iraq free and safe from explosive hazards and it must happen now. The level of contamination in Iraq is amongst the highest in the world and Iraqis are still killed and maimed by unexploded ordnance. Stopping this, will require significant investment and effort from all stakeholders. Iraqi mine action authorities will also need to continue to invest in national capacity and encourage the use of new technology, and techniques to ensure that the work is as cost-effective and safe as possible.

### **What will be the UNMAS Iraq priorities in 2024?**

In 2024 we will continue to technically support GoI mine action entities. Technical support is also including the support we provide to Iraqi police to build sustainable proficient national capacity. We have an excellent collaboration and relationship with Iraqi police entities engaged in the mine action sector, and we want to continue to build on this and support where most needed. Priority is also to continue our support of the NNGOs we have invested in over the last three years so that they can be sustained and continue their lifesaving work amongst Iraqi impacted communities. Bringing more Iraqi women to the mine action sector and supporting them in their much needed roles has always been a priority, but our work in this regard is not done. We will continue to support Iraqi women to continue their critical contributions and increase their leadership and representation in the sector in 2024.

# A Story from UNMAS Iraq:

Traditionally, mine action jobs, and especially roles technical in nature, have been considered exclusive for men, even though these does not require muscular efforts but rather mental focus and an ability to strictly follow procedures. Since inception, UNMAS in Iraq has actively promoted and strengthened women’s participation in mine action as part of its ongoing commitment to gender mainstreaming in mine action. One good example of this is effort is Hadeel, a 33-year-old female from Mosul.

Hadeel lived in the old city of Mosul at the age of 24, and as one of the top 10 high achiever graduates from the Faculty of Agriculture, was recruited to work in the governorate office. “The day I started to work was the happiest day in my life, as I knew I would be able to reap the benefits of my studies, and it would allow me to support my family financially,” Hadeel recalls. A few months later, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) arrived and occupied the city, and her dreams were quickly crushed. “During the occupation of Mosul by ISIL, we were unable to escape; we were hiding in our house and did not leave for four years, only in extremely urgent circumstances.”, she

shares.

Hadeel could not support her family after losing her job, adversely affecting their financial well-being as she had been the sole source of income. She could not leave the house for fear of her life, which turned into a giant prison. In 2017, after the liberation of Mosul, Hadeel insisted that she must seek employment to eradicate the traces of ISIL and save the city to compensate for the loss of work and years of life because of the ISIL occupation. Hadeel had a passion for mine action and wanted to participate in freeing her town from explosive ordnance and reduce the threat on people’s lives. Despite her everyday concerns regarding the work challenges, she started to work with one of the UNMAS implementing partners in Mosul. Her family initially opposed to her participation in this work since it threatened her life; but she insisted that she could do it.

After two years, Hadeel is now a skilled mine action professional, a wife and mother of a two-year-old child, and a living example of how nothing can stand in the way of the determination of a woman to pursue her goals and dreams.

## Achievement summary in 2023:

- Provided Explosive Ordnance Disposal/Improvised Explosive Device Disposal (EOD/IEDD), Level-3 Team Leaders certification course, Explosive Hazard Management First Responder (EHFR/T<sup>3</sup>), Post-Blast Investigation (PBI) and Global Position Systems (GPS) training to 316 Mol police officers including 25 women officers.
- Provided EORE lifesaving messages for 24,213 people (3,223 women, 9,237 girls, 10,348 boys, and 1,405 men.
- Cleared 2,481,934 million square meters of land and removed 5,186 EO items.
- By the end of 2023, women represented 28 percent of the technical and support staff amongst the UNMAS Iraq’s implementing organisations, in a sector previously, and traditionally, dominated by men in Iraq.





## UNODC in Iraq

In 2023, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) focused on supporting Iraq in areas such as trafficking in persons and the smuggling of migrants, drug trafficking, countering terrorism, countering corruption, and financial crimes, and more.

### Empowering Justice: UNODC's Strategic Initiatives under the Global Action against Trafficking in Persons and the Smuggling of Migrants (GLO.ACT) Project

Under the GLO.ACT project, UNODC undertook various initiatives to strengthen anti-trafficking and anti-smuggling efforts in collaboration with criminal justice actors from Federal Iraq and the Kurdistan Region.

A significant initiative involved the development of a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for the investigation of trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants. UNODC formed a technical working group comprised of criminal justice actors from Federal Iraq and the Kurdistan Region to elaborate this SOP for frontline officers and specialist inves-

tigators. Several workshops were held, and a completed draft has been produced.

Simultaneously, UNODC assisted authorities in Baghdad and Erbil in the drafting of laws to criminalize migrant smuggling, aligning with Iraq's commitment to the U.N. Protocol Against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea, and Air. The drafting stages for both laws are complete, awaiting passage through the respective Parliaments. Multiple events were organized throughout the year to support the development of these laws.

To enhance intelligence capabilities,

UNODC provided capacity building for police in Federal Iraq and Kurdistan, along with Assaiyish<sup>1</sup> Officers in Kurdistan. This focused on harnessing Open-Source Intelligence (OSINT) in the investigation of trafficking in persons, including social media. Continuing its coaching efforts, UNODC provided support for high-performing police investigators in both Federal Iraq and the Kurdistan Region. The coaching sessions are designed to allow participants to set the agenda and focus on areas where they are experiencing difficulty.

Additionally, UNODC addressed the issue

1- Assaiyish is the Kurdish security organization and the primary intelligence agency operating in the Kurdistan region in Iraq.





of trafficking for organ removal through a workshop involving investigators, judges, academics, and medical professionals from Federal Iraq and the Kurdistan Region. The workshop concluded with clear recommendations for Iraqi authorities to consider.

UNODC also collaborated closely with Assaiyish operational officers and commanders in Kurdistan, conducting multiple training events to enhance investigative capacity to counter the smuggling of migrants. This effort included facilitating a two-day mock investigation involving Assaiyish officers not only to build knowledge but also to foster increased cooperation between different Assaiyish offices.

In the realm of improving international criminal justice cooperation in the trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants' investigations, UNODC orchestrated a study visit for investigators and judges from Federal Iraq and the Kurdistan Region to Europol and Eurojust in the Hague. This visit provided valuable insights into organizational functions and laid out concrete steps for future cooperation.

### Reshaping Iraq's Battle Against Drug Trafficking: Strengthening the Capacities of Iraqi Law Enforcement and Criminal Investigation Services

In 2023, UNODC played a vital role in Iraq's fight against drug trafficking under the project "Strengthening the Capacities of Iraqi Law Enforcement and Criminal Inves-

tigation Services."The initiative, funded by the U.S. Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL), aimed to support Iraq's National Strategy on Countering Narcotics. Iraq's vast borders, neighboring several nations, and post-the ISIS vacuum intensified the illegal narcotics trade and usage. The surge in narcotics seizures, notably Crystal Meth, Amphetamine pills, and Captagon emphasized the need for urgent and effective counter-narcotics strategies.

Following a solicitation from Iraqi authorities, UNODC engaged in Controlled Delivery research to assist law enforcement in countering narcotics.

Collaborating with the Iraqi Anti-Narcotic General Authority and key parliamentary committees, the focus was on the controlled delivery approach. Controlled delivery is the technique of letting illicit or suspicious shipments move in or out of one or more states, under the strict surveillance of competent authorities, to track and identify the trafficking network leaders. However, its success relies on regional cooperation and legal frameworks, emphasizing the importance of international partnerships and legislative reforms in Iraq.

### Enhancing Counter-Terrorism Initiatives in Iraq

While it remains challenging to address and control the causes of terrorism, governmental agencies can develop or enhance tools and measures to respond to its consequences. By understanding the impact of trauma on survivors and

supporting victim-centric approaches in criminal justice responses, authorities can help safeguard victims' rights in all stages of the judicial proceedings.

"Supporting victims of terrorism within the criminal justice framework, including through psychological support" has been a novel and unique project, funded by the Kingdom of the Netherlands, launched by UNODC in February 2021 to support these objectives. Implemented in partnership with AVT-L (Association des Victimes du Terrorisme), the initiative sought to address the needs of the most vulnerable victims of terrorism (VoTs) in Iraq, who have been subject to systematic human rights violations at the hands of ISIS fighters since 2014.

The project aimed specifically at enhancing national capacities to guarantee victims' rights before, during and after criminal proceedings. The initiative also promoted the rehabilitation process and empowerment of VoTs within their communities through psychological support. Victims who experienced heinous violence were provided with counselling and psychological support by a team of AVT-L psychologists, art therapists and social workers. The project also included training for community leaders on youth and women empowerment, as well as on preventing violent extremism, to support reconciliation across the community spectrum, including between victims and suspects' families. Workshops also served as a safe space for civil society actors and government officials to exchange and discuss on challenges related to supporting victims of terrorism in Iraq, and to promote civil society engagement in national counter-terrorism efforts.

From February 2021 to June 2023, a total of 18 workshops, events and meetings were implemented, reaching a total of 182 Iraqi law enforcement and criminal justice practitioners (including 35 female), as well as 98 (76 female) victims of terrorism. Furthermore, 37 (3 female) judges received support in reviewing cases involving victims of terrorism.

As a result of the action taken, participating law enforcement and criminal justice officials have increased their knowledge of the recognition of victims of terrorism and thus are better equipped to supporting victims of terrorism and to handle highly sensitive cases with care. Participating victims of terrorism have benefitted greatly from the cooperative



nature of the workshops and have gained important tools to defend their rights in criminal proceedings and to vocalize their traumatic experiences in this safe setting. The programme also helped identify legislative and procedural gaps and challenges concerning the protection and treatment of victims of terrorism before, during and after criminal proceedings, and showcased the importance of a strong and efficient judicial system in providing access to justice for victims. Participating judges have also gained awareness of the crucial role emotional well-being and cognitive abilities play in their professional performance, particularly when dealing with victims of terrorism.

The project closed with the online social media campaign “Victims’ Voices, Silencing Terrorism” organized by UNODC, on the rights of victims, UNODC’s relevant mandate and work, and the necessary effort to prevent and counter-terrorism. The campaign, which was shared on UNODC websites and social media networks has already reached more than 23 million views.

## **Empowering Futures: STRIVE Juvenile’s Journey in Safeguarding Children from Extremism in Iraq**

STRIVE Juvenile is a five-year project supported by the European Union that aims to address child association with terrorist and violent extremist groups and its consequences for the lives of children and society at large. In 2023, STRIVE Ju-

venile in Iraq marked significant progress in safeguarding children from terrorist and violent extremism through partnerships with the Ministry of Justice (MOJ), the Higher Judicial Council (HJC), and the National Security Advisory (NSA).

Recognizing the crucial role of criminal justice professionals, UNODC conducted training for over 130 professionals, including social workers, guards, police officers, judicial investigators, and lawyers working within “Rehabilitation schools” and “observation houses.” These professionals received specialized training on the treatment and detention conditions of children deprived of their liberty for alleged association with terrorist and violent extremist groups. With regards to these capacity-building workshops; particular focus was placed on professionals dealing with child returnees from Syria who are accused/sentenced for terrorism offences.

The workshops focused on age-appropriate communication, compliance with international standards, prioritizing children’s health, and well-being, addressing special needs, recognizing the unique requirements of girls in detention, and addressing the needs of children with disabilities. Beyond skills development, these sessions served as a constructive platform for exchanging experiences, identifying challenges, and collaboratively exploring both short-term and long-term solutions. The insights gained have significantly informed UNODC’s interventions throughout the year and will shape future initiatives.

## **UNODC’s Successful Implementation of the Returning Foreign Terrorist Fighters in Detention Programme in Iraq**

Prison systems worldwide grapple with formidable challenges stemming from punitive criminal policies and a lack of community-based social protection services. Consequently, the global prison population continues to surge, now exceeding 11 million individuals. Amidst this complex landscape, one pressing issue that demands attention is the reintegration of returning foreign terrorist fighters (RFTFs). To tackle this multifaceted challenge, UNODC has effectively completed the Returning Foreign Terrorist Fighters (RFTF) Detention Programme (2019-2023), generously funded by the Bureau of Counterterrorism, U.S. Department of State.

UNODC’s implementation of this programme has yielded invaluable insights into the challenges, requirements, and priorities faced by the Iraqi Correctional Service (ICS). The programme has empowered the ICS by equipping them with the necessary tools and policies to address existing threats and adapt to evolving circumstances. Additionally, it has encouraged the involvement of civil society organizations in rehabilitation and post-release support, facilitating the reintegration of violent extremist prisoners into society. Furthermore, the programme has bolstered coordination among various authorities within Iraq.

The programme’s foundation lies in the belief that sustainable change can be achieved by activating and strengthening institutional capacities, awareness, and ownership. This positions Iraq favorably to confront the challenges posed by RFTFs in the future while adhering to the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules). Nevertheless, continued support remains crucial. In several countries, sustained efforts are needed to consolidate and extend the progress achieved during the program, ultimately leading to safer prisons and communities within their borders and beyond.

## Countering Corruption and Financial Crimes in Iraq

UNODC is actively involved in strategic initiatives to combat corruption and financial crimes in Iraq. Initiatives include the Siemens Integrity Initiative-funded project, “Strengthening Private Sector Capacity”, aimed at enhancing business integrity. UNODC also leads the regional effort “Strengthening National Capacities to Counter the Financing of Terrorism in Iraq and Jordan,” funded by Germany, facilitating discussions on asset recovery and mutual legal assistance.

To foster dialogue and partnerships between public and private sectors, UNODC held the high-level Basra Conference, organized in cooperation with the Commission of Integrity of Iraq.

Approximately 170 distinguished participants, including senior officials from various ministries and national authorities, gathered to discuss integrity enhancement, combating corruption, and the private sector’s role. The conference laid a foundation for implementing recommendations, strengthening the private sector’s anti-corruption role.

As part of its ongoing partnership with Iraq on the subject, UNODC further conducted workshops on “Enhancing the Effectiveness of Mechanisms for Asset Recovery and Mutual Legal Assistance (MLA) in Criminal Matters,” fostering international cooperation. Co-funded by GIZ Iraq, the workshops facilitated the exchange of best practices and established direct communication channels between central authorities in Iraq, Egypt, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America. The workshops equipped Iraqi officials with practical knowledge to expedite MLA requests.

In a parallel vein, as Iraq undergoes the MENAFATF AML/CFT Mutual Evaluation (ME), UNODC engaged directly with Iraqi authorities and stakeholders to support compliance assessments with the Forty Recommendations on Combating Money Laundering and Financing of Terrorism and Proliferation. This engagement involved technical meetings that equipped the Iraqi counterparts with the knowledge necessary to develop and implement effective nationwide policies for ML/TF risk mitigation.

Based on the criminal investigation principle of “follow the money,” UNODC provid-



ed technical and legal assistance to Iraqi authorities to enhance capabilities in conducting effective parallel financial investigations. In 2023, UNODC conducted two national workshops for Iraqi investigative judges, emphasizing the importance of financial investigations in ML/TF crimes. Additionally, Iraqi officials participated in a regional workshop with a focus on elevating knowledge and skills, aligning with FATF recommendations. The sessions covered legal and operational aspects, evidence development, and international cooperation, addressing the MENAFATF AML/CFT Mutual Evaluation Process. Furthermore, the workshops addressed the tracing of illicit financial flows, and the seizure and confiscation of assets, and included hands-on exercises with practical cases that allowed participants to apply acquired skills.

Concurrently, UNODC developed a guidance document outlining strategies for a robust framework to achieve a high level of effectiveness in AML/CFT systems, consisting of 11 frameworks corresponding to the FATF’s 11 Immediate Outcomes. Moreover, to further prepare Iraqi authorities, UNODC organized mock sessions focusing on Iraq’s AML/CFT/CPF framework. With 137 participants, these sessions deepened understanding of the FATF’s 11 Immediate Outcomes, crucial for active engagement in the ME process.

UNODC also reviewed a study prepared by Iraqi authorities on the misuse of non-profit organizations (NPOs), advising on risk classification of the NPO sector into high, medium, and low-risk categories, and conducting a sectoral risk assessment during the on-site visit.

### Bolstering Regional Airport Security

Through its Airport Communications Programme (AIRCOP), UNODC collaborates with UN Office on Counter Terrorism, World Customs Organization, and INTERPOL to enhance MENA region airport se-

curity. Through the Countering Terrorism Travel Programme (CTTP) partner organizations, UNODC delivered tailored technical and legislative assistance to improve Advance Passenger Information (API) and Passenger Name Record (PNR) systems in Iraq under the “All-of-UN” CTTP. National counterparts increased their awareness on the roles and advantages of Passenger Information Unit(s) that process passengers’ data (API/PNR) for the advance identification and targeting of high-risk/suspicious passengers travelling by air.

AIRCOP built upon this achieved awareness by facilitating the setting up and provision of IT equipment for establishing PIU in Baghdad International Airport. This effort has been coupled by enhancing national capabilities of front-line officials and passenger information analysts via behavioral detection, risk analysis and exposing Iraqis to international efficient passenger data systems, in means for better countering different organized crimes pertaining to airport security such as terrorism.

### Strengthening trade supply chain security in Iraq at Baghdad International Airport

Following the continuous capacity-building delivered by the UNODC Passenger and Cargo Border Team (PCBT), on 10 September 2023, Iraq took an additional step in bolstering its air cargo security. With the support UNODC and the World Customs Organization (WCO), and under the framework of the PCBT, an Air Cargo Control Unit (ACCU) was officially inaugurated at Baghdad International Airport.

Through the establishment of this ACCU, the PCBT will empower Iraq in its fight against illicit trafficking at border crossings. The ACCU is composed of officers from several agencies operating within the cargo area of Baghdad International Airport, who have been trained by the PCBT on risk analysis, profiling, targeting, and inspection of suspicious cargo. The Unit is already proving successful, conducting regular profiling leading to various seizures. Officers will continue to receive ongoing training and support. Moreover, in adherence to global best practices, Liaison Officers from all relevant law enforcement agencies involved in cargo control at the airport may be incorporated into the ACCU at a later stage.



## UNFPA: Supporting Government of Iraq to address population and development challenges

In 2023, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in Iraq continued its mission to ensure every pregnancy is wanted, every childbirth is safe, and every young person's potential is fulfilled. Collaborating closely with the Ministry of Health, UNFPA enhanced reproductive health services through policy improvement, infrastructure development, and community engagement. Notable achievements included the formulation of a Behavior Change Communication Action Plan and the National Family Planning Action Plan, alongside the development of policy briefs aimed at advancing family planning and understanding population dividends. Additionally, UNFPA facili-

tated the translation of crucial family planning tools into Kurdish, distributing 1,000 copies across health facilities in the Kurdistan Regional Government's jurisdiction.

Addressing public health supply chain deficiencies, UNFPA conducted a national supply chain assessment, culminating in a report that proposed data-driven strategies for strengthening the supply system. This included plans for an electronic Warehouse Management System in Baghdad and Erbil and the development of Logistics Management Information System Standard Operating Procedures. Infrastructure enhancements were also evident in the transformation of 11 Primary

Health Centres into comprehensive reproductive health service Centers of Excellence and the establishment of an ICU in Aldiwanya Maternity Hospital.

UNFPA's commitment to youth, particularly those with disabilities, saw the implementation of education and civic engagement programs, alongside vital mental health and psychosocial support. Collaborations with governmental departments in Ninewa Governorate led to the development of inclusive Standard Operating Procedures for educational programs. Infrastructure improvements made three youth centres accessible, while capacity-building initiatives empowered staff to provide disability-friendly services.



In a bold stride towards empowering women and combating violence against women, UNFPA orchestrated the establishment of protection centres, offering refuge and support to survivors of violence. A strategic plan for the transition of these shelters to government management under the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs was developed, ensuring the sustainability and institutionalization of support services for survivors of violence.

The year 2023 marked a significant milestone with the launch of Iraq's National Population Policy, a testament to UNFPA's foresight in aligning demographic changes with sustainable development. The policy, celebrated for its potential to invest in human capital, was officially launched by the Prime Minister of Iraq, underscoring a commitment to addressing population challenges aiming for a demographic bonus.

In summary, UNFPA Iraq's initiatives in 2023 have demonstrated a comprehensive approach to supporting Iraq's journey towards sustainable development, gender equality, and youth empowerment. Through strategic partnerships, policy development, and community engagement, UNFPA has laid a foundation for lasting impact on Iraq's social and developmental landscape, ensuring the fulfillment of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.





## UNOPS 2023 achievements in Iraq

### Local Infrastructure in Rural Anbar (LIRA)

Among the 4.66 million returnees across Iraq, Anbar Governorate shelters the second-largest group, with 1.48 million individuals, representing 32% of the returnee population. Only Ninewa Governorate boasts a higher concentration at 38%. Crucially, one-third of these returnees to liberated areas are at risk of further displacement due to damaged or destroyed housing. This forces many IDPs to seek precarious shelter in damaged houses, occupy vacant ones, or rely on host families. This vulnerability is compounded by a lack of basic services, including health-care, markets, water, and electricity.

To address the above mentioned challenges, UNOPS will leverage over €37 million from the German government through KfW to rehabilitate 1,870 war-damaged houses, 22 water stations, and 3 km of community roads, and bring light to communities with 1,300 solar-powered street lights.

LIRA focuses on underserved areas in peri-urban and rural settings with high returnee populations. The needs-based

approach prioritizes vulnerable communities, including returnees, women, and other marginalized groups impacted by Iraq's protracted crisis and recurring conflict.

By providing essential services alongside capacity-building and sustainable infrastructure elements, LIRA aligns with the humanitarian-development nexus. This comprehensive approach addresses both immediate needs (services) and long-term needs (capacity and infrastructure) for lasting impact.

The capacity-building component empowers both government staff and beneficiary families. Training equips them to maintain and repair essential services

after project completion, fostering self-reliance within the communities.

LIRA's approach directly aligns with the Government's commitment to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. In particular, it contributes significantly to:

- SDG 6: Clean Water and Sanitation by rehabilitating water stations.
- SDG 7: Affordable and Clean Energy by installing solar-powered street lights.
- SDG 9: Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure by repairing community roads.
- SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities by revitalizing underserved areas and empowering residents.

### LIRA Achievements 2023:



## Feature story: IMPROVING ACCESS TO WATER SERVICES FOR RETURNEES IN NORTHERN IRAQ



Following years of conflict in Iraq, water supply services have been significantly affected – including from damage and neglect to critical infrastructure. In the remote and mountainous Sinjar district, in the Ninewa Governorate of northern Iraq, this problem is compounded by a lack of surface water that makes accessing water for everyday use even more challenging. For villages in this area, tapped groundwater is the only available source of water supply.

To support people returning to their communities in Sinjar, a UNOPS-implemented project worked to rehabilitate damaged water facilities and associated infrastructure. Funded by the government of Italy through the Italian Agency of Development Cooperation (AICS), the project included drilling two new wells up to 200 metres deep to reach the potable water aquifers. It also saw the rehabilitation of concrete distribution and collection tanks.

The work helped deliver essential water services to more than 1,000 households in the Nia'ainia'a, Gulat, Garshabak and Hardan Sagheer villages.

Previously, people in the Sinjar district had to purchase water for drinking and domestic use that was sourced from private, shallow wells. However,

due to a lack of potable water aquifers, the water extracted contained high levels of sulfate, making it unsuitable for drinking.

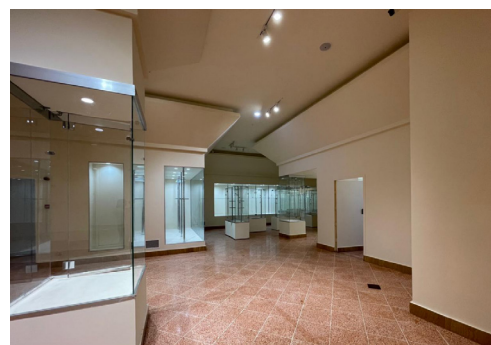
“The salty water in the village’s wells is undrinkable. It is not clean and causes diseases such as diarrhea. After the project, we feel relieved. Now, we have clean and sterilized water.” Mohammed Sayir - resident of the Hardan Al Sagheer village

To ensure sustainable operations of the rehabilitated water stations, UNOPS adopted renewable energy solutions. The project supplied and installed two solar energy systems for two wells in the Nia'ania'a village, and provided 12 solar panels and two submersible pumps to the Ninewa Directorate of Water. In addition, UNOPS trained the water facilities’ operators in operations and maintenance, supporting the longer-term sustainability of the project.

“We thank the organizations behind this project and hope that they support other villages that face the same challenge. If water and electricity are available, internally displaced people will come back to their places, homes, villages and lands,” added Mohammed Sayir.

The rehabilitated water facilities were formally completed in May 2023.

## Renovation of the Sumerian Gallery at the Iraq Museum in Baghdad



The Iraq Museum boasts an extraordinary trove of artifacts from ancient Mesopotamia. Yet, following devastating looting in 2003, all its galleries remained closed for years. Today, thanks to dedicated restoration efforts, it welcomes over 30,000 visitors annually.

Among its treasures, the Sumerian gallery on the first floor holds around 600 artifacts, representing crucial evidence of the first civilizations in Mesopotamia (4000-2000 BC). These invaluable pieces, however, lacked a proper showcase. The gallery suffered from inadequate lighting, ineffective security, and a confusing layout for visitors.

Italy has had a long history of partnership with Iraq in cultural heritage protection, collaborating with the Ministry of Culture and the State Board of Antiquities and Heritage (SBAH) since 1960. Recent collaborations include the reconstruction of the Islamic and Assyrian Galleries with Turin University (UNITO).

In line with the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS) ongoing support for Iraqi cultural heritage, a new project for the Sumerian gallery’s renovation was developed in collaboration with MoC and SBAH.

This initiative aimed to create a worthy space for exhibiting these significant Sumerian artifacts alongside a modern interpretive experience. By improving access to this remarkable heritage, the project sought to benefit both the Iraqi public and the international community. Notably, it would equip SBAH and Museum personnel with the tools and techniques to showcase Mesopotamian elements in a more engaging and educational manner, ultimately enhancing operational efficiency and managing the gallery experience effectively.

UNOPS played a pivotal role in transforming the 600-square-meter Sumerian gallery, resulting in a vastly improved design and functionality.

# World Food Programme in Iraq

## Message from

## Country Director and Representative

# ALLY-RAZA QURESHI

**D**uring 2023, Iraq has undergone significant changes, marked by improved security conditions and political stability. The Government of Iraq (GoI) is actively pursuing reforms across various sectors, with a focus on delivering better services to the population. However, the country still grapples with complex challenges, particularly in addressing the food security needs of the most vulnerable population. Drivers of food insecurity are triggered by factors such as water scarcity and water management policies, reduced agriculture and insufficient agricultural technologies, global increase in food prices, and limited livelihood opportunities for rural communities and youth. To address those challenges, the World Food Programme (WFP) supports the GoI

in achieving zero hunger by supporting the transition of the most vulnerable households, laying the groundwork for durable solutions, and ensuring the provision of livelihood-building opportunities. With a key focus on building climate resilience, WFP exerted multiple efforts to address these challenges, including ensuring that vulnerable populations have access to social protection schemes, developing income generation and entrepreneurial skills of youth, and creating livelihood opportunities for vul-



nerable communities. These efforts aimed at building self-reliance, fostering social cohesion, and contributing to long-term peace and development in Iraq.

## The year in review

Under resilience interventions, WFP has economically empowered over 5,400 men and women, and their households in 2023 through vocational training and market linkages. Graduation ceremonies for 4,000 participants were held in March, showcasing the impact of technical vocational training. The Jousour programme, spanning several governorates, supported participants through online English language and digital skills courses and entrepreneurship classes, collaborating with UNICEF and World Vision under the No Lost Generation initiative. The Jousour programme was successfully adopted by the Government of Iraq's Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research.

WFP's commitment extends to climate





change mitigation and adaptation projects, with a focus on enhancing agromet capacities, water irrigation systems, and training on desertification countermeasures. The implementation of resilience and climate change projects involves the distribution of beehives, rehabilitation of water infrastructure, and the establishment of a mangrove nursery. Efforts also include the distribution of modern irrigation equipment and drought-tolerant seeds, with a focus on empowering local communities through sustainable agricultural practices by providing smallholder farmers with climate adaptation tools, fostering agribusiness alliances, and fortifying Iraq's food system.

Collaborating with the Ministry of Education, WFP's school feeding program reached around 452,104 school-aged children during the academic year 2022



WFP is supporting the Government of Iraq to reform the social protection system in Iraq, through policies and programmes aimed to reach out to the most vulnerable and food-insecure people, particularly the crisis-affected populations and vulnerable communities. In partnership with Government of Iraq, WFP supported initiatives including the reform and digitalization of the Public Distribution System (PDS) and creating graduation pathways for social safety nets (SSN) beneficiaries, facilitating transition from social protection assistance to economic empowerment and self-reliance. Additionally, WFP is supporting the creation of a single registry as interoperable platform and the food security monitoring system to strengthen the Government capacities in social protection through evidence generation.



- 2023, contributing to daily nutritious meals in 1,403 schools spread across 13 districts. The collaboration includes addressing operational gaps, improving coordination, collecting monitoring data, and initiating policy discussions. This not only improved students' well-being but also injected approximately USD 6.6 million into local markets, creating around 900 jobs. In collaboration with the Ministry of Education and various partners, WFP facilitated the development of a comprehensive national school feeding policy, aligning it with the government's commitment to bolster primary education for sustainable impact and paving the way for the government assuming full responsibility of the programme implementation starting the Academic year 2023-2024.



Despite funding shortfalls for the emergency response activities since April 2023, WFP devised a crisis response plan to address the persistent food needs of the most vulnerable IDPs in Jada'a 1 camp, Syrian refugees, and other vulnerable groups, where the allocation of resources was prioritized based on specific vulnerability criteria to ensure timely assistance. The scar-

city of funds forced WFP to halt food assistance to 137,000 in-camp IDPs in March, reduce the in-camp refugee caseload from 72,000 to 38,000 beneficiaries in June, and extended the distribution cycle from four weeks to six weeks as of July. WFP is actively advocating with the Government for the integration of the IDP population into the national social protection schemes to ensure their food and other essential needs are consistently met.



## WFP at COP28

COP28 was an opportunity for WFP in Iraq to highlight the linkage between climate action and the food systems transformation, share the need for climate change adaptation to scale up climate action related to food, water, and energy; and address loss and damage by emphasizing the work carried out in Iraq to strengthen early warning systems and anticipatory action. As co-chair of the UNSDCF Results Working Group (RWG) No 4 on Climate and Environment, WFP contributed to and participated in 7 sessions at COP28 and led 4 sessions on water-energy-food nexus, climate change and forests in Iraq, climate finance, and green growth.





# WHO Iraq Highlights on Achievements for 2023 and way forward

## WHO’s key achievements in and contributions to the health sector in Iraq in 2023:

1. Iraq celebrated the elimination of Trachoma (Global Health Bright Spots 2023) successfully eradicating the disease - one of the neglected tropical diseases. The conclusive evaluation, conducted in Sulaimaniyah governorate of Kurdistan Region of Iraq by a WHO expert team from WHO HQ & EMRO, signifies a noteworthy achievement in public health.
2. Enhancing Sulaymaniyah Burn & Reconstructive Surgery Hospital: WHO Iraq undertook a three-stage initiative to renovate, extend, and equip the hospital, the sole provider of secondary and tertiary care for burn cases, explosion/war victims, skin cancer patients, and children with congenital anomalies in Sulaymaniyah governorate. This effort significantly reduced infections and mortality, benefiting a population of 2.3 million, including refugees, IDPs, and host communities both within and outside camps.
3. WHO Launches Environmental Surveillance Network Training to Safeguard Polio-Free Iraq: This initiative focuses on proper environmental sampling to monitor Acute Flaccid Paralysis (AFP) cases and detect the poliovirus. A crucial two-day training program on ES has been initiated, targeting selected governorates nationwide.
4. Due to the Crimean-Congo hemorrhagic fever (CCHF) situation in Iraq in 2023, a WHO expert team, representing HQ, EMRO, and CO, visited Basra and Thi Qar governorates south of the country in July 2023 where the higher CCHF case numbers were reported. After assessing the situation and capacities, WHO decided to launch a unique program providing specialized medical and psychological care for CCHF survivors. This program will also conduct a follow-up study on short and mid-term complications post-recovery. Following meetings with federal and local health authorities, approvals were secured, and the program, named CCHF Survivors Care Program (CSCP), will be implemented for the first time in the region. Basra

Governorate South Iraq has been selected as the inaugural site for CSCP in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and Basra DOH.

5. As of Dec 2023, WHO Iraq has also extended substantial support to health facilities in many parts of the country, providing more than 300,000 pieces of medical equipment, assistive products, medical furniture, and personal protective equipment (PPEs), worth of more than 1,046 million USD. These resources have been strategically distributed across various healthcare facilities and different hospitals in coordination with health directorates and relevant health departments in both Central and Kurdistan Region of Iraq ministries of health.
6. Further in 2023, WHO supported the local health authorities with over 51 consignments of medicine and medical supplies worth 1.1 million USD delivered to maintain the provision of essential healthcare services to IDPs, Refugees, and Host communities in KR-I and conflict-affected governorates including Ninawa, Anbar, Kirkuk, Erbil, Duhok and Suleimaniyah.
7. With generous donor contributions, WHO Iraq played a key role in establishing the Oncology Care Center at Duhok Emergency Hospital in November 2023. The renovation and rehabilitation of two wards were successfully carried out to relocate the oncology department from old Azadi Hospital in the governorate. The project is expected to reach its conclusion with the delivery of medical equipment in mid-January 2024, after which the center will be handed over to the Duhok Department of Health.
8. Throughout 2023, WHO continued its efforts in Ninawa Governorate by facilitating the supply of medicines and medical resources, conducting immunization campaigns, and offering capacity-building initiatives across diverse health sectors. This support extended to sustaining health services in the unofficial settlement on Sinjar Mountain, Tal Marak Maternity and Emergency Center in Talafar, and Jadaa 1 camp.
9. WHO Iraq, with support from regional and headquarters partners, played

an essential role in Iraq becoming the 2nd country globally to undergo the Universal Health and Preparedness Review (UHPR). The recommendations focused on improving the health system, strengthening health security measures, and enhancing national and international coordination, with a particular emphasis on high-priority suggestions for better health system performance and increased national health security.

10. Substantial progress in digital health innovation is evident through the successful implementation of the Health Resources and Services Availability Monitoring System (HeRAMS) and the DHIS2 platform. Achievements in the Immunization Program include capacity building, model development, DHIS2 implementation, data management, aggregate data modeling, quality assurance, validation, dashboard development, and sustainability planning. Iraq's commitment to digital health is further showcased through additional DHIS2 initiatives like TB case-based DHIS2, Nutrition, event-based surveillance system, and HMIS, emphasizing enhanced data management and efficient health service delivery.
11. In a collaborative effort in 2023 as well, WHO partnered with the Kurdistan Higher Council of Medical Specialties (KHCMS) to conduct a comprehensive two-week training program. This initiative aimed to enhance the clinical proficiency of physicians, focusing on intensive care

unit (ICU) skills and infectious disease management. The program included a Certificate Course in Critical Care and Outbreaks designed for 37 KH-CMS Physicians, providing them with specialized training. Additionally, a 6-day Outbreak Updates Training of Trainers (TOT) has been organized for 31 public health board candidates and staff, facilitating the dissemination of crucial knowledge and skills in outbreak management.

12. WHO Iraq also played a role in Iraq's approach to managing HIV/AIDS by contributing to the development of the National HIV/AIDS Strategy, scheduled for approval in 2024. Furthermore, in March 2023, WHO Iraq successfully revised and endorsed Iraq's Antiretroviral Therapy (ART) guidelines. In May 2023, moreover, WHO Iraq provided support and endorsement for the Iraq National AIDS Program's (NAP) draft guidelines tailored for People Living with HIV (PL-HIV). The organization conducted a comprehensive assessment known as the Integrated Biological and Behavioral Surveillance Study (IBBS) among key populations in Iraq—a crucial prerequisite for the subsequent implementation of the IBBS.
13. Iraq participated in the Climate Change Conference COP28 held in Dubai in December 2023. The participation which included the WHO and MOH delegations marked, for the first time, a day dedicated to health to address the impacts of climate change on human health and well-being.





## Current WHO interventions in in-need areas include:

- Construction of an Isolation Unit (14 Beds) in Erbil.
- 32 beds added to Rojhalat Emergency Hospital in addition to 60 beds to NICU with the establishment of a 4-bed ward in Pediatric ICU in the Maternity Teaching Hospital in Erbil.
- Supporting referral health facility in the Maternity T. Hospital in Erbil
- Accomplishment of phase I of the Oncology Care Center in Duhok governorate and the process with phase II of the project funded by BPRM
- Renovating & equipping the operation theater at the Burn and Reconstructive Surgery Hospital in Sulaymaniya Governorate.
- Plan to open a CCU in Sinjar Hospital,

## Ninawa governorate

- Provide & support PHC Services in 10 IDP + 6 Refugee Camps
- Capacity Building for national staff working areas of Basic Emergency Care, Infection and Prevention Control IPC, Mental Health, EWARN & CD Surveillance)
- Respond to outbreaks especially endemic diseases like Cholera, CCHF, Leishmaniasis, Meningitis
- Support to referral services in HFs in the mentioned areas.

## WHO Iraq supply chain contribution:

- Total amount of medicines & supplies delivered in 2023: 1.3 M \$
- Number of shipments received in Erbil warehouse: 48
- Number, value, and weight of ship-

ments delivered: 60 shipments worth 1.75 M \$ and weighing 100 tons

- Available funds to procure pharmaceuticals and medical supplies for 2024: 420.000 \$
- NGOs supported: HEEVIE (north region only) & DARY LNGOs (country-wide)

## Main MCH achievements for 2022-2023:

- WHO assisted the Ministry of Health in creating the Iraq Women, Child, and Adolescent Health Strategy for 2024-2030.
- Creating a three-year action plan for Iraq's Women, Child, and Adolescent Health for 2024-2026.
- Assisting the Ministry of Health in formulating the Iraq Nutrition Health Strategy for 2024-2030.
- Developing a Digital Dashboard for

Reproductive Health, Emergency Obstetric, and Newborn Care (RH & EmONC).



## EPI Program:

i. Polio/EPI program 2023 invested \$1,128,428 on activities aimed at enhancing Polio surveillance and improving the EPI program in Iraq in 2023 with the goals of ensuring no child is left behind, maintaining Iraq's Polio-free status, and completing the Polio Transition process.

ii. Polio Surveillance activities accounted for \$339,311 and included:

- Operational costs for AFP Surveillance Activities
- Mid-Year and End-Year AFP & ES Surveillance Review Meetings
- Reviewing and printing the AFP Surveillance Field Guide for MOH Iraq
- Procurement of equipment, kits, and reagents for the National Polio Lab
- Enhancing Environmental Surveillance
- Conducting a "Polio Outbreak Simulation Exercise" (POSE)

iii. EPI activities totaled \$789,117 and included:

- Supporting technically and financially a "Multi-Antigens Vaccination Campaign" reaching over 400,000 children who were defaulted or had zero doses, with the introduction of more than 1 million doses of several vaccines.
- Supporting the MOH in conducting the "Data Quality Enhancement of Iraq Measles & Rubella Surveillance Program"
- Reviewing and printing Measles Surveillance Guidelines for MOH Iraq
- Procurement of equipment and reagents for the National Measles Lab
- Supporting a "Vaccine Preventable Diseases Review Meeting"
- Supporting the MOH in conducting an "EPI Bottleneck Analysis"

## Health Technology support:

The Health Information Management &

Health Systems team at the WHO Iraq country office continues to collaborate with the Federal Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Health in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq to unify health system standards to streamline management practices and facilitate equal access to health services across Iraq.

### Key achievements include:

- Provision of a cloud data server for the Ministry of Health in the Kurdistan Region to install the DHIS2 platform, the agreed-upon digital solution.
- Successful digitization of the immunization program (monthly aggregate data) using the DHIS2 platform across KR-I's health institutions, with comprehensive training provided to all program staff.
- Completion of HeRAMS project phase I, assessing the availability of health services and resources across the region's health institutions in 2023, covering 1,434 health institutions with the organization supporting project team building and providing tablets for data entry.
- Development of an interactive information panel (dashboard) for the HeRAMS project, ensuring easy access for decision-makers in both country's ministries of health and other health institutions, available in the Kurdish language with translation efforts underway.
- Completion of the digitization of the pulmonary tuberculosis and nutrition programs, along with event-based monitoring, with plans for HR to support the program.

### Ongoing activities include:

- Commencing digitization for life statistics programs, AMR, HIV, Hepatitis, and cancer.

- Preparation for the second phase of the HeRAMS project, with cadre preparation expected to begin at the end of the month, field visits scheduled to commence in mid-April, and data collection for this phase anticipated to conclude in mid-June.

## Challenges/ recommendations to be considered for the coming biennium:

- Improve coordination and communication with health authorities in KRI especially to identify and address health needs of IDPs, refugees, and the host community.
- Maintain basic health services for IDPs, refugees, and returnees in all governorates, where such vulnerable populations are accommodated whether in camps or within the hosting community.
- Enhance the capacity of health and medical staff in DOHs of KR-I governorates, Ninawa, and Kirkuk.
- Develop digitalization of information systems to improve health systems, expand DHIS2 implementation, and introduce Electronic Health Information Systems.
- Strengthen health infrastructure in conflict-affected governorates, including enhancing referral hospital capacity through renovation/rehabilitation and health technology programs.
- Improve preparedness and response to endemic diseases, especially cholera, given past cases and diarrhea trends indicating potential outbreaks.
- Enhance the capacity of secondary and tertiary health services, addressing issues of staff attendance and the burden of IDPs and Syrian refugees on health services.
- Support primary health services in IDP and Refugee Camps, addressing capacity constraints.
- Provide essential medicines and medical supplies.
- Maintain support for the immunization program activities.



# United Nations Volunteers

## More Nationals Step Up for Sustainable Impact as UN Volunteers



In 2023, the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme in Iraq marked a significant chapter, witnessing a surge in national commitment towards Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). With an expanded force of 184 volunteers, including a well-balanced 47% women and 53% men, UNV's collaborative efforts with 11 UN agency partners and a shift towards 60% national volunteers emphasized inclusivity and reliance on local talent for sustainability.

Aligned with SDGs 16, 17, and 3, UN Volunteers actively contributed across diverse fields, from development programs to crisis response. The program's dynamic approach was exemplified by a community-centric initiative in Duhok Governorate, where 42 UN Volunteers, mobilized by the World Food Programme, played a pivotal role in the



Public Distribution System reform agenda. This initiative showcased the transformative impact of community involvement in implementing essential reforms and ensuring efficient service delivery.

Throughout 2023, UNV in Iraq partnered with various UN agencies to observe key international days. Women's Day in Baghdad focused on empowerment and inclusion, highlighting the collective commitment to advancing women's rights.

Youth Day saw volunteers engage in a Tigris River cleanup, showcasing youth's pivotal role in environmental initiatives. International Volunteer Day featured activities emphasizing the transformative potential of volunteering. A Baghdad event explored volunteering's role in addressing development challenges, while in Erbil a tree-planting initiative emphasized the "Power Of Everyone" for environmental action.

"As peace gives impetus for Iraq to move from a crisis context to development, United Nations Volunteers (UNV) looks forward to working with the Government of Iraq and integrating volunteers into the country's sustainable development agenda," said Kyoko Yokosuka, UNV Deputy Executive Coordinator during the IVD event, on her mission to Iraq on December 2023.

UNV in Iraq actively engaged with university students, youth groups, and NGOs, maintaining a focus on raising awareness and enhancing talent acquisition. Collaborative efforts with UN agencies not only promoted volunteerism but also elevated the quality of talent recruited. Participation in events such as the DAFI scholarship ceremony and the Al-Jusoor program ceremony further demonstrated UNV's commitment to creating pathways for skill development and recruitment opportunities.

In essence, 2023 was a year where UNV in Iraq saw the tangible impact of its endeavors, emphasizing the collective commitment towards sustainable development, inclusivity, and the powerful role of volunteers in shaping a brighter future.





## UN OCHA in Iraq

Iraq is in transition, and so the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) is adapting its operations while maintaining its support to the Iraq Humanitarian Country Team, assisting in the humanitarian transition process, coor-

**OCHA developed a UN joint communication strategy on humanitarian-development transition to ensure consistent, coherent and cohesive messaging about the transition**

inating, and advocating with the Government of Iraq and the humanitarian community.

In 2023, the humanitarian situation significantly improved in Iraq. The majority of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) have returned to their areas of origin. Operations have shifted from a humanitarian response to a development approach, with a strong focus on durable solutions. These developments led the Iraq Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) to conclude that a Humanitarian Response Plan is no longer required, ending nine years of such action. Nevertheless, the HCT is mindful that some form of humanitarian assistance is still necessary for the approximately 1.1 million people who remained in protracted displacement during 2023, of which nearly 180,000 persons living in IDP camps.

As a result, OCHA launched the Humanitarian Transition Overview (HTO) for 2023 on behalf of the Iraq HCT. It provides an overview on the humanitarian situation and the humanitarian transition in Iraq, represents a shared understanding of the remaining humanitarian needs and identifies critical priorities for humanitarian response and fundraising. Furthermore, the HTO intends to help donors and agencies prioritize support.

Based on the Humanitarian Transition Overview and in support of the Humanitarian Coordinator and the HCT's transition efforts, OCHA developed a UN joint communication strategy on humanitarian-development transition to ensure consistent, coherent and cohesive messaging about the transition. A digital media campaign was launched through thematic approaches to improve public aware-





ness and shed light on the transition from response to emergencies towards achieving durable solutions and sustainable development.

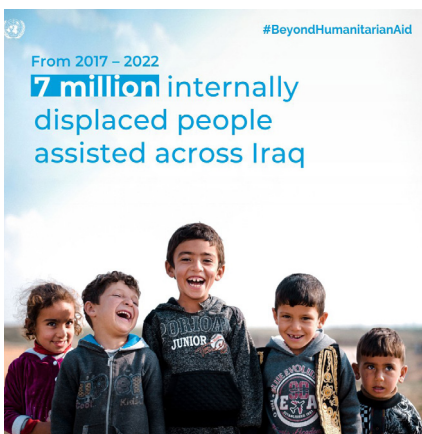
In 2023, OCHA led humanitarian coordination forums in Iraq concluded at the sub-national levels. OCHA supported the Resident's Coordinator's Office in developing the Terms of Reference (ToR) for the Joint Coordination Forums in the Governorates, which serve as a nexus structure, Humanitarian – Development – Peace (HDP).

And in response to the regional conflict and security developments in the closing months of 2023, OCHA worked with the HCT members on the development of a Contingency Plan for a potential impact on the humanitarian situation in Iraq.

With the ongoing humanitarian transition, OCHA started restructuring to reduce its footprint. By 30 June, OCHA closed its sub-offices, maintaining offices only in Baghdad and Erbil.

The Iraq Humanitarian Fund (IHF), managed by OCHA, officially closed in 2023 after seven years in operation that significantly contributed to life-saving and life-sustaining activities. By end of 2022, IHF had allocated a net funding of US \$367 million to national and international NGOs, UN agencies and Red Cross/Crescent Movement organizations. Throughout its lifetime, the IHF proved to be substantial to humanitarian partners for its inclusiveness, efficiency, timeliness, and flexibility.

OCHA will continue to support the Humanitarian Country Team in 2024 through its Iraq country office. This includes facilitating humanitarian access, coordinating, and advocating for enhanced preparedness and contingency planning with a focus on climate change and climate-induced displacement in coordination with the Government of Iraq, the Kurdistan Regional Government and the humanitarian community.





## ILO in Iraq

### Decent Work Country Programme in Iraq: Recovery and Reform

## Q&A BLOG

Dr. Maha Kattaa, the ILO Iraq Country Coordinator, offers insightful reflections on the key actions of the ILO and its impactful Decent Work Country Programme in Iraq throughout 2023. With a focus on the enduring collaboration with tripartite constituents and partners, Kattaa sheds light on the concerted efforts to bolster job creation, foster private sector development, strengthen social protection measures, combat child labour, and enhance labour governance and social dialogue.

**How did the ILO contribute to Iraq's overall development progress amid the global challenges faced in 2023 and the challenges faced by Iraq in particular? How is the Decent Work Country Programme strategically addressing these challenges?**

In 2023, we have seen how the world faced an unrestrained landscape marked by extreme disasters, escalating conflicts, and pivotal discussions about technology and gender. It was a year of critical moments yet progress often felt halted amidst a series of global challenges. Unfortunately, we all have witnessed how these crises pushed countless people into poverty, hunger, and danger. Concurrently, humanitarian efforts faced critical challenges in keeping pace with the escalating needs.

Back to Iraq, the country grapples with significant challenges, including a 30% poverty

rate, rural-urban disparity, an 800,000-employment drop post the 2014 crisis, gender disparities with a mere 10.6% female labour force participation, and income inequality within the workforce. The informal sector casts a shadow over nearly a two-third of the working-age population.

In response, the Decent Work Country Programme in Iraq, developed collaboratively with the government, trade unions, and employers, addresses these challenges by focusing on three key strategic priorities: supporting job creation and private sector development, strengthening social protection and combating child labour, and enhancing labour governance and social dialogue.

In 2023, the ILO played a pivotal role in Iraq's transformative journey, navigating the aftermath of two decades marked by violence and societal divisions. Despite global chal-

allenges, the ILO remained steadfast in its commitment to Iraq's progress, championing collaborative efforts with the government, employers', and workers' organizations.

While ongoing efforts are in place, specific outcomes and improvements related to promoting decent work and social justice in areas like youth employment, skills development, MSMEs development, financial inclusion, fighting against child labour, social protection, and ensuring fundamental principles and rights at work are detailed in the DWCP's Annual Progress Report for 2023.

### **Why does the Decent Work Country Programme in Iraq prioritize job creation and private sector development as its first priority?**

Iraq grapples with a significant job crisis, exacerbated by years of conflict and one of the lowest employment-to-population ratios in the region. Unemployment rates are particularly high among women, youth, and displaced communities. Limited growth in the private sector poses a major barrier to extensive job creation. The ILO's priority is to achieve decent work for all, and by focusing on job creation and private sector development, the programme aims to provide access to decent and longer-term income-generating opportunities, especially for vulnerable groups. This approach aligns with the ILO's mandate to support sustainable employment outcomes and contribute to job-rich economic growth.

### **How does the Decent Work Country Programme address vulnerabilities in Iraq through social protection and efforts to combat child labour as its second priority?**

Basically, because the acute need for basic social protection in Iraq, given the impact of conflict and income loss, underscores the importance of the second priority. Despite ongoing efforts to enhance existing schemes, many vulnerable groups, including internally displaced persons and persons with disabilities, remain underserved. Moreover, child labour is a reality, further necessitating urgent action. The ILO's approach involves extending social insurance, boosting private sector development, and promoting equal opportunities by reallocating human capital toward the private sector. The establishment of a Social Protection Floor and direct protection activities targeting vulnerable groups, including IDPs, PWDs, and children at risk of child labour, is being a key focus, aligning with the ILO's commitment to 'leave no one behind.'

*Narges Said, an internally displaced person originally from Mosul, Iraq. She is one of a group of young people who received financial education and further support to access affordable loans for their businesses through the financial inclusion programme supported by the Central Bank of Iraq and the ILO.*

### **Why is strengthening labour market governance and improving social dialogue mechanisms a priority under the**

### **Decent Work Country Programme in Iraq?**

The Iraqi labour market faces significant governance shortfalls, reflecting broader challenges in the governance environment. While laws and frameworks express the possibility of tripartite collaboration, effective social dialogue remains constrained. Implementation of the labour law framework is lagging, and gender equality remains a critical factor. Realizing Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work is pivotal for inclusive and resilient development. The ILO is committed to strengthen governance institutions by enhancing the contribution of social partners to tripartite fora, particularly in social security management. In this approach, we are seeking to demonstrate the value of representative labour market structures, guiding policy-making for better labour market functioning. Additionally, we are advocating for optimized inspection resources and streamlined procedures that contribute to the effective realization of labour market governance objectives.

### **Can you highlight some notable achievements and initiatives from the four-year implementation of the Iraq Decent Work Country Programme, particularly in creating employment opportunities and fostering sustainable employment models?**

Certainly. Over the past four years, the Iraq Decent Work Country Programme, led by the ILO, has achieved significant milestones. Noteworthy initiatives in-



clude ongoing consultations with the Government of Iraq to create 100,000 job opportunities through a Public Works Programme, reflecting a commitment to inclusive economic development. The transition from emergency cash-for-work initiatives to sustainable public works programme through the Employment Intensive Investment Programme approaches signifies a paradigm shift, fostering sustainable and productive employment. Collaborations with key stakeholders and institutions, including the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and business service providers, have empowered entrepreneurs and enhanced financial inclusivity.

Over the course of the four-year implementation of the Programme, ILO, working in tandem with its tripartite constituents, has achieved noteworthy milestones in response to the pressing challenges faced by the people of Iraq affected by conflict, unemployment, and a deficit of decent work.

A pivotal accomplishment includes the publication of the National Labour Force Survey (LFS) in collaboration with the Ministry of Planning, the Central Statistical Organization, and the Kurdistan Region Statistics Office. The LFS, a first in over a decade, has not only filled a critical data gap but has also served as a foundation for numerous research papers and policy discussions. Roundtables and conferences facilitated evidence-based and country-specific policy proposals, paving the way for the drafting of a new National Employment Policy for Iraq.

Addressing the issue of informality, the ILO contributed significantly to the publication of an informality diagnostic and the formulation of a national framework aimed at transitioning from the informal to the formal economy.

In support of Iraq's reconstruction and recovery efforts, the adoption and operationalization of the ILO's Employment Intensive Investment Programme (EIIP) by the government of Federal Iraq and KRI have resulted in the creation of 82,157 worker days, benefiting 1,460 job seekers, including a significant proportion of forcibly displaced persons and women.

In the realm of entrepreneurship, collaborative efforts with the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, Business Development Service (BDS) providers, NGOs, and UN

agencies have led to the institutionalization of ILO's Start and Improve Your Business (SIYB), Financial Literacy, and Know About Business (KAB) programmes. This initiative reached 2,383 entrepreneurs, with a focus on women and youth from internally displaced, refugee, and host communities, enhancing their business capacities.

The ILO's financial inclusion strategy, operationalized by the Central Bank of Iraq and Al Thiqa Microfinance Institution in Federal Iraq and KRI, facilitated access to loans for Iraqi entrepreneurs and Syrian refugees. This initiative resulted in the creation of 1,388 direct jobs and benefited at least 6,940 individuals.

Furthermore, the institutionalization of the Child Labour Monitoring System (CLMS) and Child Labour Standards has been a pivotal step, impacting over 8,000 children. Child Friendly Learning Spaces were established, providing mental health and psychosocial support and recreational activities, leading to the withdrawal of 2,173 children from child labour in IDP affected areas.

Endorsement and publication of Labour Inspection and Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) policies, along with capacity building for labour and OSH inspectors and government officials, are additional highlights of the ILO's multifaceted efforts in Iraq. These policies have been endorsed

by both Ministers of Labour and Social Affairs of Federal Iraq and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

These achievements collectively underscore our commitment to promoting decent work, tackling diverse challenges within the Iraqi workforce, and advancing inclusive economic development while fostering sustainable employment.

### **Could you share specific achievements and highlight the changes and impact resulting from the Decent Work Country Programme in Iraq during 2023?**

Absolutely. In 2023, our efforts under the Decent Work Country Programme in Iraq yielded significant achievements, reflecting our commitment to enhancing the well-being of workers and promoting social justice. One noteworthy accomplishment was the successful ratification of two crucial ILO conventions: The Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952 (No. 102), and the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006 (MLC, 2006). This ratification process, guided by the ILO, was officially completed by the Government of Iraq in March 2023. These conventions are set to enter into force in March 2024, and we are poised to provide ongoing technical support to the government and social partners as they fulfill their reporting commitments.

Another pivotal moment in 2023 was the adoption of the new Social Security Law



for Private Sector Workers by the Council of Representatives in Federal Iraq in May. This law marks a significant reform in the social security system for private-sector workers, aligning it more closely with ILO's Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952 (No. 102). The reforms expand the legal coverage of the social security system, now encompassing all workers, including informal workers, the self-employed, and contributing family workers. Notably, the law introduces additional entitlements, such as maternity and unemployment benefits, a crucial step forward in enhancing the social protection framework.

Additionally, our technical support extended to the Government of Iraq in developing a comprehensive "Iraq national strategy to prevent and reduce inequalities in the world of work for the years 2024-2028." This strategy, a collaborative effort with social partners, is on track to be endorsed in the first quarter of 2024. It signifies our dedication to addressing and mitigating inequalities in the world of work, further aligning with the broader goals of the Decent Work Country Programme.

These achievements underscore our commitment to fostering a fair and inclusive work environment, promoting social justice, and contributing to the overall socio-economic development of Iraq.



### **The United Nations in Iraq, including ILO, released a statement on child labour recently. What key aspects or initiatives does it highlight and elaborate on?**

The statement released by the United Nations in Iraq, including the International Labour Organization, addressed the critical issue of child labour in conjunction with the 2023 World Day Against Child Labour. The focus was on advancing social justice as a means to tackle child labour, aligning with the theme 'Social Justice for All. End Child Labour!' The intention was to shed light on the persistent challenges faced by children in Iraq, especially those driven to work due to poverty, economic hardships, and the aftermath of conflicts. We emphasized the need for collective efforts to protect the fundamental rights of every child, as evidenced by the 2018 UNICEF Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, which revealed concerning rates of child labour among children aged 5-14 in Iraq.

We are committed to work closely with the government and relevant stakeholders to enhance policies, build capacities, and address root causes that force many young children into work. Despite Iraq's ratification of key conventions protecting children, the persistent challenges necessitate ongoing collaborative actions.

Allow me to highlight the recent efforts, such as the institutionalization of the ILO-supported Child Labour Monitoring System (CLMS) and the establishment of Child-Friendly Learning Spaces (CFLS) in coordination with local authorities. These initiatives aim to provide vulnerable children with protection, support, and non-formal education, ultimately striving to eliminate child labour.

We believe that efforts to address the root causes of child labour, including skills development for families of working children and the recent adoption of the Retirement and Social Security Law for Private Sector Workers, are crucial steps in creating lasting positive impacts on families and children.

Social justice for children and their families remains our top priority and it is the collective responsibility of all partners to ensure that no one is left behind.

*ILO PROSPECTS in Iraq supports livelihoods and decent work for refugees, IDPs*

*and host communities. The programme includes a financial inclusion initiative to support businesses to access loans and build their financial and business skills and the development of vocational training programmes in market-relevant occupations. Read more*

### **Can you provide insights into the impact and achievements of the Work-Based Learning programmes recently completed in Duhok and Mosul?**

Definitely. The Work-Based Learning programmes in Duhok and Mosul, implemented by the ILO under the PROSPECTS Partnership, marked a significant milestone with the graduation of 400 participants, women and men from forcibly displaced and host communities. These programmes covered 18 occupations, engaging 60 enterprises and enterprise owners, along with various government and social partners. The aim was to equip participants with market-relevant skills, facilitating their transition to decent work. The collaborative efforts with tripartite constituents, including governmental bodies, vocational training centers, chambers of industry and commerce, and social partners, contributed to the success of these initiatives.

Allow me to add that the ILO, along with our partners, envisions expanding these Work-Based Learning programmes to inform the development of a national framework for Work-Based Learning and apprenticeships in Iraq.

### **Could you expand on the ILO's partnerships and collaborations under the Decent Work Country Programme in Iraq?**

The ILO places a strong emphasis on collaborative efforts within the Decent Work Country Programme in Iraq and in line with the UNSDCF. We have forged valuable partnerships with esteemed UN agencies, including UNESCO, WFP, UNICEF, UNHCR, UN Women, UNDP, IOM, UN-Habitat, FAO, UNFPA, the World Bank, and IFC, besides some international and national NGOs. This diverse network reflects our comprehensive approach towards fostering decent work in Iraq. Additionally, our engagements extend to local Civil Society Organizations at the governorate level, fostering robust connections within the Iraqi communities we serve.



# Advancing Stability: IOM's whole-of-society approach for development in Iraq in 2023

**IOM also contributed to strengthening Iraq's capacity in effective migration management through enhancing identity registration systems and border management surveillance initiatives, while upholding the dignity and rights of all migrants**

**N**early a decade after the conflict with Daesh, Iraq is on track to full recovery. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) in Iraq is also transitioning from humanitarian emergency operations to sustainable development support in the returnee and host communities to foster peace and build resilience; address mobility concerns of migrants; and support the Iraqi government to enhance the country's migration governance.

**Preparedness and Response:** To ensure that returnees have proper housing, 1,320 households who had returned to their areas of origin were assisted with rehabilitation support, and 680 households still living in protracted displacement, or secondary displacement in unfinished buildings or damaged shelters, received support for lifesaving, quick repairs. IOM also provided camp

coordination and camp management (CCCM) support to two camps and multiple informal settlement sites for internally displaced persons across Ninewa, Kirkuk, Baghdad and Anbar benefiting over 23,000 individuals.

**Transition and Recovery:** In 2023, IOM Iraq continued to provide a comprehensive array of services to address the diverse needs of the vulnerable returnee communities through facilitating voluntary movements; quick impact projects to enhance access to basic services in the areas of return and relocation; and economic recovery through individual livelihoods assistance and support to Small Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs). Through IOM's Durable Solutions programme, more than 2,000 households consisting of nearly 10,000 individuals were able to return to their areas of



origin or relocated to new areas in 2023. IOM provided access to basic services such as water, electricity, health, and education through 63 infrastructure projects in 51 communities across Iraq. Nearly 4,100 individuals received livelihoods support packages, and more than 800 SMEs received financing through our Enterprise Development Fund (EDF), creating over 4,000 new jobs and contributing to long-term stability. Additionally, IOM Iraq also helped returnees and members of host communities to reconstruct and rehabilitate their houses in areas impacted by displacement, with 1,320 households being assisted in 2023; and over 3,000 individuals engaged in short, cash-for-work schemes, to allow for a quick injection of funds into local economies.

**Peacebuilding and Stabilization:** In tandem, IOM worked in partnership with the Government of Iraq and partners to build resilience in the communities of return through Prevention of Violent Extremism (PVE) programming; strengthening the transitional justice frameworks; provision of Mental Health and Psychosocial support (MHPSS) services to 21,050 individuals (12,558 women and 8,492 men), peacebuilding and tribal engagement activities to resolve barriers to of return.

Additionally, IOM's community policing approach was implemented across communities in Iraq to strengthen trust and social structure to alleviate conflict at various levels. Our commitment to PVE has been a cornerstone to fostering peace, stability, and resilience in Iraq. In 2023, IOM supported the development

and launch of seven plans of action, which localize and contextualize Iraq's national PVE strategy to the district level, including in Al Falluja, Halabja, Hawija, South Mosul, West Mosul, Tel Afar, and Zubair. We will continue to support their implementation through technical assistance and joint activities with the government led sub-committees.

By addressing post grievances and promoting accountability, IOM supported, and continues to support, the healing of the Yazidis and other minorities who experienced genocide at the hands of Daesh. IOM supported 1,513 survivors of genocide to apply for reparations through the Government of Iraq's General Directorate for Survivors Affairs and strengthened the capacity of survivors' networks. This was complimented with legal support to obtain civil documentation and housing, land, and property support, in line with durable solutions. In October 2023, the Yazidi Genocide Memorial, which was designed in consultation with the Yazidi community and constructed by IOM with support from Nadia Initiative and USAID, was officially opened in Solagh, Sinjar. The memorial immortalizes the memory of thousands of victims of genocide and provides a place for the community to come together and collectively mourn and remember their loved ones - an important step in the healing process, and long-term stability.

**Migration and Health:** As a trusted partner of the Government of Iraq's Ministry of Health, IOM contributed to major milestones in the country's strategy to develop a strengthened health sys-

tem. IOM provided technical expertise and organized capacity building workshops, bringing together different local stakeholders including governmental sectors and civil society organizations, to develop national and district level plans and guidelines, including the first Annual Plan for Climate Change and Health and Migration, the first climate change and migration informed Health Emergency Preparedness and Response (EPR) Plan for Thi Qar governorate, and National Health Education and Promotion Guidelines.

**Resettlement and Movement Management:** In 2023, IOM provided flights and departure assistance for 3,497 resettlement beneficiaries, traveling to 11 countries, with the highest number of refugees going to Australia, Canada, Norway, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America. IOM's departure assistance includes ground transportation for medical appointments, exit permits and airport as well as document management and storage. Additionally, RMM Iraq provided arrival assistance for 450 individuals returning to Iraq through the Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration program.

**Migration Management:** IOM also contributed to strengthening Iraq's capacity in effective migration management through enhancing identity registration systems and border management surveillance initiatives, while upholding the dignity and rights of all migrants. IOM provided trainings and established three new training centres; and technical and logistical support to the Government of Iraq to reduce the time taken to



generate and print unified identification papers from 3-5 months to three days. Additionally, IOM digitized workflows at the Třebil border crossing point; supported the development of the National Migration Data Assessment and Migration Data Action Plan; and established the National Referral Mechanism responsible for reintegration of returnees in Iraq.

**Protection:** Recognizing the inherent dignity and rights of every individual, IOM prioritizes protection programming with tailored assistance for survivors of violence and abuse and supports the safe return and reintegration of all returnees. In 2023, IOM provided protection services to 11,729 individuals (consisting of 2,442 men; 8,558 women, 510 girls and 219 boys; of which 494 are persons with disabilities) in Iraq; including 5,573 internally displaced persons; 4,886 returnees; and 1,062 host community members.

Protection services targeted survivors and persons at heightened risk of human rights violations with tailored case management services, including 1,148 individuals (929 women, 195 men, 18

girls and 6 boys; and 128 persons with disabilities) who have experienced or are at risk of violations and abuse, including violence against women and girls in camps, informal sites, and areas of return. Other activities within the protection intervention included information services such as awareness sessions and campaigns, referrals to specialized services, community outreach, recreational activities, and emergency in-kind and cash distributions.

**Climate Change and Displacement:** Climate change poses a real threat to Iraq. In recent years, low levels of water flow from the Tigris and Euphrates rivers have failed to push back the tidal wave of salty seawater inching northward. This creeping saltwater is destroying countless palm groves and other agricultural crops in its path, that have flourished for millennia. In Thi-Qar Governorate, the marshes are drying up due to low levels of water due to decreased rainfall; the construction of dams in neighboring Türkiye and Iran on the rivers or their tributaries; and an absence of sustainable management of water resources locally. As a result, rural-urban

migration in response to environmental degradation and natural hazards is rising at an alarming rate as families seek employment in urban areas or are forced to send their children to work in cities to cope with the loss of income. IOM's Climate Emergency Tracking in Iraq has recorded displacement of more than 135,498 people between 2016 and December 2023 due to the adverse effects of climate change in their areas of origin.

The 2023 achievements serve as a testament to our unwavering commitment to the post-conflict reconstruction and development in Iraq, and we will continue to support the people and government of Iraq. As new challenges emerge in the country, a lot more still needs to be done: over 1.1 million people are still displaced across Iraq, primarily concentrated in internally displaced camps in the Kurdistan Region and informal settlements in Kirkuk, Baghdad, and Anbar. In the coming years, IOM will continue to support the people and government of Iraq as it continues its journey towards stability and prosperity, and a brighter future for all the people of Iraq.





**UN Women organized a number of interlinked trainings and capacity building sessions for women candidates and aspirants looking to run for the provincial council. Overall, more than 84 female aspirants and candidates who are looking to run for the upcoming took part in these trainings and capacity building programmes**

interlinked trainings and capacity building sessions for women candidates and aspirants looking to run for the provincial council. Overall, more than 84 female aspirants and candidates who are looking to run for the upcoming took part in these trainings and capacity building programmes.

The primary goal was to provide and equip female candidates and aspirants with the knowledge and skills necessary to run, train and conduct successful provincial council elections and campaigning. UNWomen focused on the importance of increasing women's presence in provincial councils and encouraging women to take an active role in their localities and governorates through advocating for relevant critical issues, and to providing them with the required skills and tools to navigate a complex political landscape. Additionally, the workshop also sought to enhance campaign strategies, elucidate the new rules and regulations of the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC), and explain the electoral process and quota system.

## UN Women in Iraq

# 2023 Achievements

### Women Political Participation (WPP)

In 2023, UN Women focused on empowering women aspirants and potential candidates who are looking to run for upcoming elections. This followed coordination efforts with key strategic stakeholders, including the Independent High Elec-

toral Commission, the Parliamentary committee for Women, among others, with the aim of developing a plan to support women's participation in the upcoming provincial election.

UN Women organized a number of



## Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) & 2nd Iraq National Action Plan (INAP II)

**U**NWomen has greatly contributed to advancing the implementation of the INAPII at all levels engaging with various government institutions including ministries as well as civil society organizations. Formal coordination mechanisms were established at the federal and Kurdistan level to effectively foster knowledge exchange and the sharing of experiences in INAPII implementation in

both regions. Government counterparts, non-governmental actors and the civil society acquired an enhanced ownership, accountability, and commitment towards UNSCR1325. As a result, a comprehensive M&E framework was developed through various consultations and was then automated to facilitate effective monitoring of INAPII implementation. A communications strategy for the INAP II was

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created with clear indicators and targets and launched in partnership with civil society, government and media actors. 6 sectoral plans at the ministerial level and 2 sectoral plans at the governorate level have been endorsed and being implemented with the support of civil society. The sectoral plans have clear indicators and budgets and have been an essential tool in ensuring the commitment of government counterparts towards the advancement of the WPS agenda and UNSCR1325.

At the Kurdistan level, UNWomen technically supported and contributed to the finalization and endorsement of the Kurdistan regional action plan which bolstered the implementation of the second Iraqi National Action Plan (INAPII) for UNSCR1325. This signified a significant stride, demonstrating the dedication of both government and civil society in their commitment towards WPS. An event was done to launch this plan chaired by the Minister of Interior and attended by the Secretary general for the High Council of Women & Development, UN Women Representative, civil society representatives and members from the international community.

## Women Economic Empowerment (WEE)

UN Women has been prioritizing women and girls empowerment across all of its interventions during 2023 working to strengthen the resilience of vulnerable women through the provision of women spaces and WEE based opportunities. Engaged women have been equipped with marketable, demand-driven green innovative skills, increased awareness and knowledge about climate-smart practices. The targeted women participated in business development and entrepreneurship skills sessions to enhance their capacity in establishing small to medium-sized green businesses.

Similarly, and to bolster their leadership qualities, UN Women has also played a pivotal role in the women's community engagement through establishing and strengthening community-led committees focused on gender, climate action, and disaster risk reduction (DRR) contributing to positive gender-equitable climate-resilient attitudes and practices. Meanwhile, the engaged women are presumably benefiting from capacity-building initiatives such as credit-seeking, technical development, networking, and online marketing. Additionally, women have participated in green skills opportunities (i.e., henna, ecotourism, and urban horticulture, inputs for featuring agricultural tech). Men and boys were also engaged on gender, climate change, and DRR to better facilitate the change that WEE champions can present and introduce.

In addition, UN Women partnerships with civil society organizations in Khanaqin and Baghdad led to developing comprehensive programs aimed at empowering women through business development trainings and entrepreneurship opportunities. This approach ensures that women not only participate but also drive growth. This was very effective especially for displaced women as they needed to achieve independence and strengthen their resilience.

## Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and Humanitarian response

UN Women interventions have not only brought benefits but have also laid the groundwork for sustainable long-term change. They have played a role in breaking down barriers promoting independence enhancing women's involvement in peace processes and providing vital assistance during humanitarian crises. As a result of partnering with 14 organizations in 2023 and successfully completing projects with 9 partners at the start of the year, their impact has extended across 15 governorates, throughout Iraq.

UN Women provided more than 200 women and girls including widows and divorced women with humanitarian assistance which was secured by safe spaces that are managed by local NGOs. Safe spaces were fundamental in providing psycho-social support (PSS), health referrals, legal services and cash for work opportunities.

UN Women contributed to the establishment of Women's Community Mediation Forum in Muthanna and Diwaniyah through the Women, Peace & humanitarian Fund (WPHF). This showcased a commitment towards enhancing women's involvement in peacebuilding and decision-making processes. These forums have provided platforms for collaboration among women's empowerment units government institutions and community leader which highlighted the role women play in resolving conflicts and leading communities.

UN Women Iraq has actively supported initiatives to address VAW/GBV by providing psychological advice in areas like Anbar. These efforts have been crucial in offering services to women and fostering an understanding and mitigation of gender-based violence. Moreover, the ILP project has showcased responses in Anbar and Diyala Governorates. By focusing on empowering women socially as well as addressing displacement-related issue; these initiatives have provided invaluable support to women facing challenging circumstances.

## Events and joint initiatives:

To celebrate International Women's Day, the Prime Minister's Office proudly sponsored the "Women of Earth Festival," which was organized by Dr. Shahbaa Al-Azzawi, the Prime Minister's Advisor for Youth, Sport and Women Affairs, in partnership with UN Women. Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed S. Al-Sudani commended Iraqi women for their leadership and constructive role in society and confirmed the government's commitment to women's empowerment. In Prime Minister Al-Sudani's speech during the "Women of Earth Festival" held in Baghdad to commemorate International Women's Day, he emphasized that "the government's vision and understanding of the role of women in society is present in the government program, based on the principle of equality and with a recognition that building community begins and ends with them."

An International festival was launched by Iraqi Women Journalist Forum (#IWJF) and in partnership with UN Women to honor 15 exceptional women journalists from various countries with the Atwar Bahjat Award 2023. Atwar Bahjat was an Iraqi journalists considered to be an icon for Arab journalists around the world and represented the strong voices of women and the courage and resilience of Iraqi women.

Many journalists from all around the Arab world from Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Yemen, Syria, Mauritania and Egypt as well as famous celebrities including Elham Shaheen participated in the event.



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