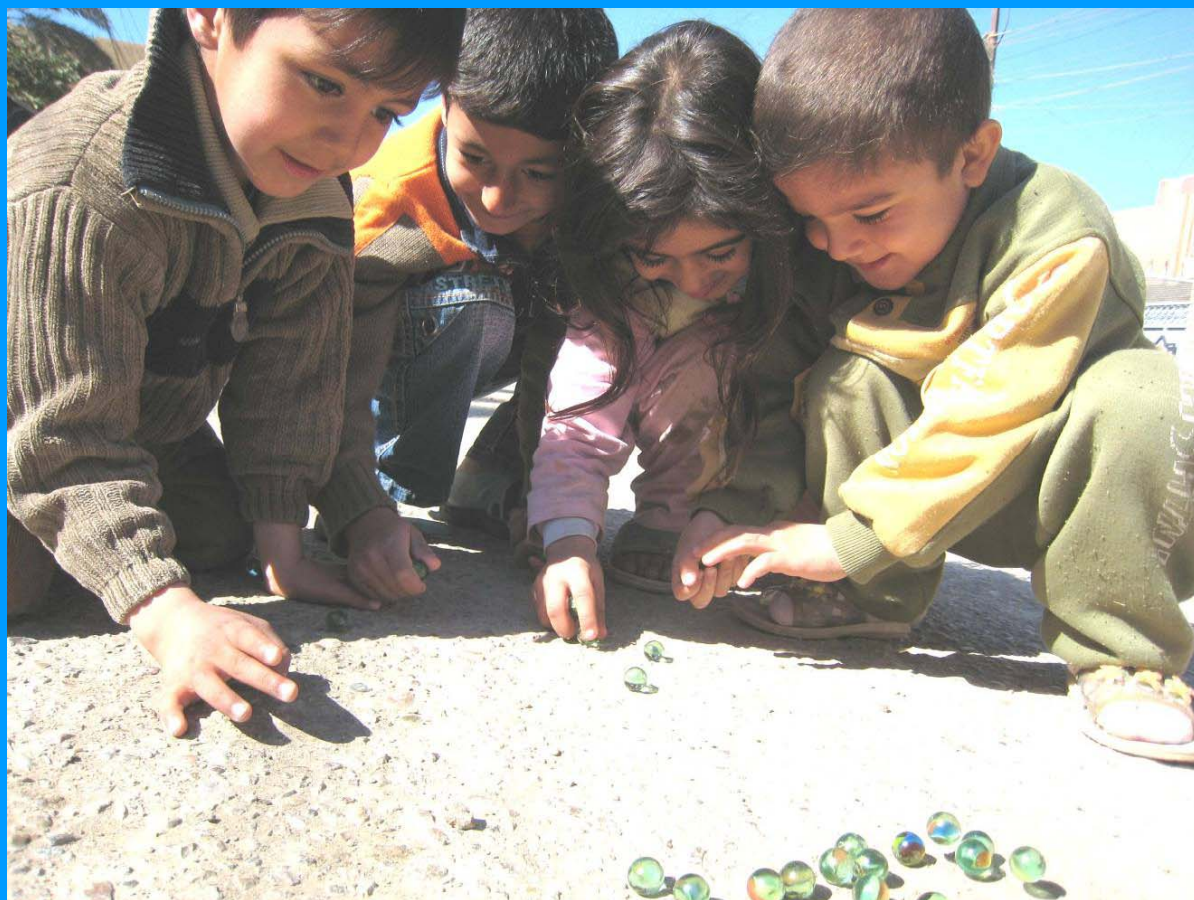


UNICEF Iraq

**Update for Partners
on the Situation of Children in Iraq**

First Quarter 2008



**For every child
Health, Education, Equality, Protection
ADVANCE HUMANITY**

unicef 

Representative's Overview

2008 began on a promising note for children in Iraq. Violence had fallen in Baghdad. Schools and shops were opening in some of the capital's formerly most insecure areas. The national cholera outbreak had subsided, fresh displacement was at the lowest level since 2006, and the latest polio immunization campaign had been successfully completed.

However, the last two months have seen new challenges arise. In February, national officials reported a 33% rise in the number of Iraqis killed over the previous month, reversing a six-month trend of declining casualties. Major mass casualty attacks took place in Kirkuk, Mosul and Samarra. UNICEF was one of several UN Agencies and NGOs to quickly respond with support to treat victims and repair schools.

Further north, tensions between Turkey and the PKK spilled over into a Turkish incursion into the Kurdistan Region. UNICEF worked with other UN Agencies to confirm preparations against any humanitarian need.

In March, the Iraqi Government launched its largest-scale military operation to date against militias in Basra, Baghdad's Sadr City, Kut and other Shia strongholds. The operation was met with fierce resistance, as well as a marked increase in rocket and mortar attacks against Baghdad's International Zone.

Families were caught by surprise at the onset of the attack, and with 24 hour curfews keeping them indoors, water supply and medical shortages were soon reported.

UNICEF was able to maintain and share a detailed picture of emerging events thanks to national staff and facilitators on the ground. UNICEF was also among the first to mobilize a response, thanks to pre-positioned supplies and good relationships with local contractors. Existing UNICEF water tankering contracts were extended to include Basra - allowing a limited operation under an ongoing curfew. This soon expanded to cover 4,000 families and provide 320,000 litres of safe drinking water as soon as hostilities ended. UNICEF health supplies were also delivered to hospitals. Conditions in Sadr City are still far from resolved and UNICEF continues to cooperate with the many humanitarian actors providing relief on the ground.

While constraints were biting in Basra and Baghdad, greater freedom of movement in Anbar helped UNICEF respond to a different kind of threat. A measles outbreak was reported in parts of the governorate - evidence of the impact of conflict and insecurity on routine immunization services. An emergency immunization campaign supported by UNICEF and the World Health Organization reached over 200,000 children in Anbar - a 96% success rate against official population targets.

The psycho-social impact of conflict on children has become a growing concern in the first months of this year. Footage sourced by the Multi-National Forces – Iraq (MNF-I) of children purportedly being “trained” by Al-Qaeda was swiftly followed with reports of disabled women and even mentally-challenged children being used as unwitting suicide bombers. And still over 500 children reportedly remained in MNF-I detention – most without charge - for alleged security violations.

While Iraq's needs are certainly as high as ever, the capacity of UNICEF and its partners to meet them is steadily improving. The launch of the Iraq Consolidated Appeal Process (CAP) for 2008 signaled a strong step forward towards a more harmonized vision for Iraq's needs between UN Agencies and NGOs, also involving Iraq's Government. The CAP requested \$267 million for humanitarian projects (including \$37 million for UNICEF's emergency action). UNICEF strongly supports the CAP, which defines how the UN and partners will respond to the needs of the most vulnerable, relieve family suffering, improve partnerships and link to broader recovery efforts.

UNICEF has completed the first stage of Iraq Info – a database on all Iraq's development indicators – another step towards strengthening monitoring and results-based management. Data collection for Iraq Info will be greatly enhanced by our recent deployment of 15 Chief Facilitators to every south/central Iraqi governorate, to promote UNICEF operations and coordination on the ground.

UNICEF also began increasing the presence of its international staff inside Iraq, including in Baghdad's International Zone. Five senior staff visited Baghdad during March, to help complement our already large and growing national presence on the ground. Our efforts to promote development in the Kurdistan Region continue. In February, the region celebrated the creation of its first Baby-Friendly Hospital with UNICEF support – we hope the first of many.

Finally, our partnerships for humanitarian action are expanding through IMPACT: Iraq, our emergency approach. Four international NGOs will work with us to deliver a multi-sectoral and assessment-driven response in every governorate, and build a clearer picture of needs. We expect this network to work closely with other humanitarian actors in Iraq's governorates, to better inform appropriate responses.

As ever, our support to children depends on support we ourselves receive. We greatly appreciate the contribution of \$4 million from the United Kingdom to UNICEF's IMPACT: Iraq emergency response approach through the CAP, as well as contributions from our Italian National Committee and the US Fund for UNICEF, and an allocation of \$3.8 million of UNICEF's internal resources. Other valuable contributions, notably from Denmark and Netherlands are allowing recovery work to proceed in education.

We particularly welcome a \$1 million donation from Nokia, via a unique public-private partnership to rehabilitate 8 schools in Iraq's poorest areas. Ongoing support from the Iraq Trust Fund is also enabling a continued UNICEF & WHO cholera response. Thanks to UNICEF's largest bilateral partner, the Government of Japan, primary health services for women and children are being improved in northern Iraq.

However, needs are still acute. To date, our country programme budget of \$119 million for this year is still just 32% funded, including our CAP projects funded at just 26%.

Every dollar of support for Iraq's children – whether through UNICEF or other organizations – is appreciated by the UNICEF team. It is particularly encouraging for our 100 Iraqi staff and facilitators inside Iraq. These people work daily and without fanfare to deliver for Iraqi children, despite the many risks they face. They are the best indicator of Iraq's capacity to one day provide for its own people. Like Iraq's irrepressible children, they preserve the hope that their country can and will recover.

Roger Wright
UNICEF Special Representative for Iraq

Recent Emerging Issues and Events

(i) Security and Violence:

Against the trend of declining insecurity witnessed in Baghdad during the last months of 2007, major security incidents resurfaced in January 2008 and continued throughout the year's first quarter. February saw a reported rise in the number of Iraqis killed by 33% over the previous month, reversing a six-month trend of declining casualties. Mass casualty attacks around the north-central cities of Kirkuk, Mosul and Samarra, also occurred during the first quarter of 2008. Further north, the border area between Iraq and Turkey saw increased Turkish military operations against PKK positions located on the Dohuk and Erbil border areas; Turkey's first ground offensive into Iraq since 2003. Thankfully, humanitarian consequences remained negligible, as the locations where fighting took place had already been abandoned late last year when conflict broke out.

In March, Basra and Baghdad saw a serious deterioration in security following an escalation in hostilities

between Shia militia and Government of Iraq (GoI) forces. This was shortly followed by a sharp escalation in tensions in Basra, with the deployment of Iraqi troops to rid the city of rogue elements of the Mahdi Army.

Insecurity quickly spread to surrounding governorate capitals, including Kut (Wasit) and Samawah (Muthanna). After one week of heavy fighting, Shia cleric Muqtada Al-Sadr called for his fighters to stand-down; the curfew on Baghdad was lifted on the last day of March and people were reported to be moving freely in Basra the same day. The situation will continue to be monitored closely in collaboration with other actors via the Humanitarian Working Group, chaired by the Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

UNICEF, UNHCR and OCHA are working together with Kurdistan Region (KR) authorities to conduct an assessment of the emerging drought in the north of the country.

Comprehensive assessments are expected to begin in April to prepare for an eventual response by June.

(ii) Health and Nutrition:

In February, measles cases were being reported throughout the country, mainly in Anbar, Baghdad-Risafa, and Suleimaniyah. The outbreak continued through March in Anbar, and cases this year could well exceed those reported last year. During the first 12 weeks of 2008, 263 confirmed measles cases were reported in Iraq, out of which 170 (65%) were reported in Anbar, 38 (14%) in Tikrit, 25 (10%) in Kirkuk, 20 (8%) in Mosul, and eight (3%) in Baghdad-Karkh. This increase in the number of cases could be attributed to ongoing violence and insecurity in most parts of central and southern Iraq, making it harder for families to access health centres for immunization and other primary health care services, as well as affecting health workers'

ability to conduct outreach activities. Despite a UNICEF/WHO supported mop-up campaign for under-fives, cases are still being reported, mostly in children over five. Antibody response is expected in 3-4 weeks.

No major security incidents were reported during these mop-up campaigns; however, one vaccinator in Ba'aj district of Ninevah was retained by security forces, who suspected the vaccinator was supplying insurgents with health services. The vaccinator was released unharmed after two days.

Reports received from UNICEF Facilitators in the field during February indicated that leishmaniasis continues to spread in Iraq's southern province of Qadissiyah, with at least 275 cases reported. Out of these, 212 cases are

cutaneous leishmaniasis, while the remaining 63 cases have been diagnosed as visceral leishmaniasis, which if left untreated, can have a fatality rate as high as 100% within two years (WHO).

The implementation of the Reach Every District (RED) approach, aiming at increasing immunization coverage in low performing areas, appears to be progressing well in most districts of the central and southern governorates.

(iii) Water and Sanitation:

Areas strained by rapid IDP influx continue to face extreme stress on water and sanitation services, well in excess of local capacity. Safe water availability and access to safe sanitation remains a challenge to the large number of IDPs (estimated at 2 million), with one-third reportedly relying on broken pipes, lakes and streams as primary water sources.

Sanitation remains a key concern. It is estimated that 31,000 tons of solid waste are produced every day in Iraq, while local authorities' capacity for waste collection is estimated at only 4,000 tons per day. The resulting gap is enormous and leads to solid waste accumulating in the streets or being dumped into natural depressions and empty lots. This inability to dispose of solid waste in an appropriate manner poses grave health risks, especially through the contamination of the water table.



UNICEF/Arar/2007: Sanitation conditions for IDPs in Suleimaniya

(iv) Child Protection and Women and Child Rights

In February, international media reported instances of children being trained as suicide bombers, triggered by footage and other documents belonging to Al-Qaeda obtained during a raid by the Multi-National Forces – Iraq (MNF-I) in Dila. The official spokesman for the Ministry of Defense warned against the spreading of the phenomenon of children being abducted by Al-Qaeda, confirming that the Government has taken measures to tackle this issue.

The number of children detained by the MNF-I has fallen from 950 (aged 10-17 years) as at December 2007 to just over 500 reported by MNF-I in

March 2008. Information on whether children have been released or transferred to other facilities has not been made available. The majority of children in MNF-I facilities are detained without charge. Meanwhile, the number of children reported held in Iraqi facilities has seen a reported rise from 400 at the end of 2007 to over 1,000 by March 2008. Unsupervised visits to children in detention have not been possible. UNICEF and the UNAMI Human Rights Officer are urgently following up with all stakeholders to secure a better understanding of children's conditions, ensure their access to due process and develop opportunities to divert them into a community-based system for restorative justice.

Following reports of terrorist groups using children and women with disabilities as suicide bombers, the Director of Operations at the Ministry of Interior in collaboration with the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA) announced the launch of a campaign to round up homeless children, beggars and the mentally disabled from the streets of Iraq to reduce the risks of them being recruited by armed groups in terrorist operations. UNICEF's Child Protection and Participation (CPP) unit is following up with MoLSA and the Child

Welfare Commission (CWC) to better understand the Government's plans for carrying out this campaign, as well as the arrangements put in place to support children and women who will be affected.

In February, international media featured reports of child trafficking from Iraq into Spain. MoLSA refuted these rumors as baseless; saying that child trafficking exists but is limited to individual cases and cannot be considered a social phenomenon. UNICEF will continue monitoring the situation.

UNICEF Iraq in Action

Humanitarian Action

In response to the eruption of intense clashes between Shia militia and GoI forces in Basra and Sadr City and the imposition of curfews in late March, UNICEF was among the first humanitarian actors to provide humanitarian assistance to families, mainly water, despite extreme limitations on humanitarian access. Within days of the crisis, UNICEF began the distribution of potable water to several affected districts in Basra, covering 17 sites including major health facilities such as the Basra General Hospital, the Pediatric and Maternity Hospital and the Blood Bank. By the 5th of April, over 4,000 families had received safe drinking water (675,000 litres) through this operation, which included the distribution of at least 500 jerry cans (provided by UNHCR) to communities hosting IDPs.

UNICEF was also able to deliver emergency medical supplies sufficient for up to 12,000 patients to six major hospitals in Basra to help treat the large number of injured. Medical supplies were as well as to the Medical City Hospital in Baghdad and the Directorates of Health (DoHs) in Sadr and Kut.



UNICEF/Rubaye/2008: Water tankering in Basra under curfew

In Sadr City, water tankering was resumed after the curfew was lifted, with 100,000 litres distributed in the Sab Q'soor area, as well as 10,000 litres delivered to each of the Imam Ali and Sadr Hospitals in April.

Unfortunately, one member of the water tankering team was killed and the operation was temporarily suspended. Additional supplies are being pre-positioned in accessible locations in Baghdad and Basra in case of resumption in conflict in the coming days, including 26 million water purification tablets.

UNICEF also provided 4,396 IDP families in DIALA, Najaf and Qadissiyah governorates with Water, Environmental Sanitation and Hygiene emergency relief aid. Main supplied items include sanitary napkins, soap, baby and adult hygiene kits, collapsible water containers, garbage bags, buckets and toilet jars.

UNICEF joined other key humanitarian players in responding to mass casualty attacks in Mosul, Suleimaniyah, Kerbala and Baghdad – including provision of mainly emergency health assistance and restoration of the education system in affected areas. Various hospitals were provided with

emergency health supplies for the treatment of injuries, including emergency health kits, first aid kits, different sizes of cannulae and needles, as well as gauze and surgical gloves. Quantities provided were sufficient for the treatment of nearly 3,500 patients.

The explosions in Mosul caused the damage/destruction of six school buildings and one kindergarten, to which UNICEF responded by delivering recreation kits to affected schools in Zinjeeli area. A total of 2,900 school bags were also distributed to students in areas affected by across-the-border bombardment.

Responding to Measles Outbreak:

In response to the recent outbreak of measles, UNICEF and the World Health Organization supported a ten-day mop-up campaign starting 21st March in Anbar. The campaign reached 197,975 children (out of an estimated 206,550) between 9-59 months - approximately 96% of the target. A five-day mop-up campaign started on 30th of March in selected districts, following an outbreak in Ninevah, targeting nearly 40,000 children aged 12-35 months with Measles, Mumps and Rubella (MMR) vaccine, and another 10,000 children aged 7-11 months with measles vaccine. UNICEF support to both campaigns included the provision of vehicles for transportation of mobile teams and assistance for social mobilization activities.

Implementation of the Reach Every District (RED) Approach and Immunization Interventions:

UNICEF continued supporting Ministry of Health (MoH) efforts to raise immunization coverage rates in districts with low coverage. In February/March, UNICEF supported the training of key staff from the Expanded Programme on Immunization (EPI), as well as supporting social mobilization activities and logistical/transportation services



UNICEF/Arar/2007: polio immunization for the under-served

for mobile out-reach immunization teams. UNICEF organized two sessions of training courses on immunization for a total of 90 staff (54 males, 36 females) working in immunization units inside Erbil Governorate.

Provision of Basic Health and Nutrition Supplies: During February, UNICEF continued to distribute essential health and nutrition supplies to Directorates of Health (DoHs) including nearly 35,000 sachets of Oral Rehydration Salts (ORS) to Missan and

Thiqar, and Al-Iskan Paediatric teaching hospital in Baghdad, as well as 15 cartons of therapeutic food. A total of 150 Sonicaid devices (Fetal Heart Doppler) were distributed to DoHs throughout the country. In addition, 150 manikins and 150 resuscitation sets for essential newborn care training were distributed to all DoHs, and medical and nursing colleges. In March, an additional 15,000 sachets of ORS, 210 Iodized salt test kits and 120 cartons of therapeutic feeding supplements were provided to DoHs in Erbil, Dohuk and Suleimaniyah. These supplies were provided for management of diarrhoea cases and moderate and severe malnourished children in the Primary Health Care Centres (PHCCs), while the iodized test kits are used by DoHs

to monitor the level of iodine in salt produced by salt producing factories.

Rehabilitation /Construction of PHCCs and Vaccine Store:

Rehabilitation of PHCCs in Dohuk and Suleimaniyah is progressing well through the Project Cooperation Agreement signed between the NGO Peace Winds Japan and UNICEF. In most areas work has been completed, reaching progress of about 30-40%. Construction/rehabilitation work in Erbil is expected to start soon. Meanwhile, the expansion of the Babil vaccine store to regional store status has reached almost 50% progress; completion expected by end of April/early May.

Home-based and Supplementary Learning Materials:

A workshop to evaluate materials developed for grades one and six was held for 12 MoE staff in Amman during February. A representative from the National Institute for Educational Training in Palestine conducted the initial training. Revised materials will be piloted in four schools in Basra and another four in Erbil.

Accelerated Learning Programme (ALP):

A workshop to develop an ALP Teacher's Guide was held in Amman. The guide will help teachers focus more on student participation and extra-curricular activities, while using the revised ALP textbooks. In addition, teachers will receive further training in the basis of this guide during the summer holiday of 2008. A four day workshop was held in March for directors of Education and ALP Supervisors from KR, which resulted in the extension of ALP from three levels (years) to five in the northern governorates; In addition, a total of 2,700 school bags were sent to Directorates of Education (DoEs) in Dohuk, Erbil, and Suleimaniyah for the benefit of 1700 ALP students currently enrolled in 30 ALP centres in the north.



UNICEF/Arar/2007: Accelerated Learning Programme gives a second chance to pass primary exams

School Rehabilitation: The rehabilitation of eight schools was completed during March as part of a *joint project with UNHABITAT*, bringing the total of schools rehabilitated under this project to 72 out of 90 selected in 2006. Work in an additional 13 schools is ongoing with funds saved from this project. The project will benefit 64,975 students and teachers.

Rehabilitation has started in eight schools under the *Integrated Community Initiative for Children (ICIC)*, with up to five more underway. The project will benefit over 20,000 school children and teachers (including guest schools using the buildings).

In Dohuk, Erbil and Suleimaniyah, 24 schools have been selected for a *project funded by Denmark to improve conditions in schools in northern Iraq*. Rehabilitation of at least 15 of those schools is expected to begin shortly. The project will benefit over 12,570 students and teachers.

Preparations to rehabilitate eight schools through a *NOKIA public-private partnership* are finalized and work will begin early April. The project will benefit over 6,765 school children and teachers (including guest schools using the buildings).

Early Childhood Development

(ECD): The distribution of 745 ECD kits started early in February to 577 kindergartens, 107 grade one primary school level and 61 nurseries located in 15 governorates across Iraq. During March, teams comprising the National ECD Committee and UNICEF-contracted engineers began an assessment of the ECD National Centre in Baghdad, in preparation for supporting the enhancement of conditions in the Centre through

establishing a children's theatre and a library.

Iraq National Education Strategy:

UNICEF, UNESCO and the World Bank facilitated a workshop for 22 Ministry of Education (MoE) and Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) officials, as a first step of the joint endeavor for developing a multi-year sector strategy for Education.

Representatives from a number of UN agencies, US Embassy in Iraq and the British Council actively participated in the workshop.



UNICEF/Arar/2007: ECD for children in Baghdad

Water Tankering: In February, 52 million litres of water were distributed to un-served, under-served areas of Baghdad city and IDP locations in Anbar and Ninevah governorates, benefiting some 215,000 people. In March, 140,500 people in five residential areas and three hospitals in Baghdad city, as well as 2,500 IDPs in Anbar governorate were served with 30 million litres of drinking water. Water tankering in Sadr city was temporarily suspended due to ongoing fighting and curfew. Information on UNICEF water tankering in response to the Sadr City/Basra crisis is covered under the "Humanitarian Action" section.

Rehabilitation of Water and

Sanitation Facilities: Construction of upstream storm sewer lines in Hay Al Baath district in Kirkuk City was completed, improving sanitary services for 12,000 inhabitants. Rehabilitation of Al Shuhada'a water network in

Wasit governorate was also completed, improving access to safe water for 40,000 inhabitants. Out of the remaining four rehabilitation projects, progress was recorded in three project sites, while the Basra project is critically behind schedule (24% implementation rate). UNICEF is following up with contractors and Government authorities to find a solution for delayed projects. In addition, rehabilitation of three sewage labs in Najaf, Nineveh and Diwaniyah governorates is ongoing, with completion rates of 65%, 83% and 40% respectively.

Capacity Development: UNICEF commenced a training course on Basic Geographic Information System (GIS) applications in Wasit and Kirkuk governorates for 32 technical staff from the Ministry of Municipalities and Public Works (MMPW). Training will be completed on 20 April 2008.

Solid Waste Management Master Plan: A contract was signed with a local consulting firm and work for development of a Solid Waste Management Master Plan for Basra

began. Based on outcomes of the Master Plan, short and long-term measures will be undertaken to improve solid waste management practices in Basra governorate.

Mine Risk Education (MRE): As part of the ongoing project with INTERSOS covering four governorates in centre/south (Basra, Thiqr, Missan and Muthanna) a total of 82 schools were provided with MRE during February, reaching more than 22,000 students. In Missan and Muthanna, 23 Community Volunteers trained with UNICEF support provided MRE to more than 1000 community members.

During March, an additional 10,000 posters, 4,000 colouring books and 5,000 board games were delivered to project areas to be used by children and other community members. Meanwhile, the third phase of the Child-to-Child MRE programme is carried out in Basra and Thiqr and will reach 200 children in 22 schools. In Muthanna and Thiqr, MRE emergency sessions were provided to more than 300 pilgrims walking to Kerbala, who may have been at risk of crossing contaminated areas.

National Injury Surveillance: Under the ongoing joint project with UNDP and WHO on "National Injury Surveillance Integrating Victims of Landmines and Explosive Remnants of War (ERW)", training of data collection teams and pre-testing of data collection tools were completed, with 61 staff from Al-Kindi Teaching Hospital and Basra General Hospital trained. This pilot project will form the basis for a systematic data collection mechanism for landmine and ERW victims at the national level.

Reintegration of Children without Caregivers: In the framework of the reintegration project carried out by the NGO EMDH, another 22 children were reunified with their families during March, while the 36 already reunified in the previous phases of the project underwent the probationary reunification process. EMDH and

MoLSA social workers will closely follow-up the reintegration process over a six-month period.

Training for Social Workers and Teachers: Comprehensive training was provided to 414 MoLSA social workers and teachers countrywide during the period from July 2007 to February 2008 to improve their skills in working with children, child rights, networking, setting goals and action plans, conflict resolution and peace building programmes.



UNICEF/Arar/2007: Mine Risk Education initiatives for young children

Vocational Training: A total of 80 children (14-18 years) are receiving vocational training through six workshops on welding, repair and maintenance of generators, building electricity installations, carpentry, sewing, as well as repair and maintenance of air-conditioners. The course is organized by MoLSA with UNICEF support and is expected to last for 65 working days.

Child and Youth participation: A rapid assessment (through an on-line questionnaire and Focus Group Discussions Guidance) on youth participation was launched on UNICEF's Voices of Youth website in early March. The initiative aims at gathering information from a sample

of Iraqi young people on their perception of available opportunities for active participation, despite the current volatile situation in their

country. Results will provide a clearer picture of current opportunities for young people's participation in Iraq.

Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS3): 1,000 copies of the English version of MICS3 were printed and disseminated to partners inside and outside of Iraq (also available on www.childinfo.org).

IraqInfo Database: The first draft of IraqInfo has been produced, in collaboration with the Central Organization for Statistics and Information Technology (COSIT), Kurdistan Regional Statistical Office (KRSO), UNDP, and OCHA and is now available for use. The database includes an initial set of MICS3 data, data from the 2004 Iraq Living Conditions Survey and a selection of other major official survey data for Iraq. UNICEF is currently working with the DevInfo Support Group to make an online version available in April.

Media and Advocacy: On the 20th of March, UNICEF issued a press release jointly with WHO to mark World Water Day, which coincided with the 5th anniversary of the war. The press release highlighted the impact of lack of sanitation and polluted water supplies on the health of children, and called for a renewed drive in 2008; International Year of Sanitation, to invest more in Iraq's water and sanitation sector.

Looking ahead

Quality Learning and Development:

Data entry for the 2007/2008 School Survey conducted in December 2007, covering over 20,000 schools across Iraq for all levels of education, is expected to start within the next few days. Dissemination of the analytical report for the Child Rearing Practices Survey and survey outcomes/recommendations is expected to take place in April 2008.

Water and Sanitation: Recognizing that the government has resources of its own, UNICEF is seeking to adapt a cost sharing principle with its counterparts, namely the MMPW, Mayoralty of Baghdad and the Ministry of Municipalities in KR. Co-financing of

water and sanitation projects will help to expand the pool of resources, paving the way for improved collaboration, increased self reliance within the government and attaining targets set by UNICEF and the GoI. Such interventions will ultimately help Iraq in meeting the MDGs.

Child Protection: The Special Representative of the Secretary General for Children and Armed Conflict will be visiting Iraq in April, to discuss the impact of conflict on children (particularly child detentions and child involvement in violence) as well as issues surrounding humanitarian access.

Sanitation Crisis Causes Misery for Iraqi Families

Lack of Safe Water and other Essential Services Still Affecting Millions

AMMAN/ERBIL/GENEVA, 18 March 2008 - Poor sanitation and polluted water supplies are reaching crisis levels in Iraq, causing illness in children and deepening family poverty according to UNICEF and the World Health Organization.

Years of conflict and under-investment have undermined Iraq's vital social services to the point where many basic family needs are going unmet. Water and sanitation networks have been particularly affected by damage to local infrastructure and a lack of skilled staff.

Currently, only 17 per cent of Iraq's sewage is treated before being discharged into the country's rivers and waterways. Untreated wastewater from Baghdad alone is enough to fill 370 Olympic swimming pools every single day. Pools of sewage are also a common sight across north and south Iraq, spreading disease and depression in communities.

"Lack of hygiene and unsafe drinking water are priority concerns for Iraqi families, second only to security," said Roger Wright, UNICEF Special Representative for Iraq. "In some areas they face squalid living conditions more usually seen in less developed countries. Too many are stretching scarce household resources to find safe drinking water – which should be readily available to all."

He said that young children are suffering particularly. Waterborne diseases and related malnutrition are keeping many out of school and undermining their healthy growth.

The condition of existing water and sanitation systems can be seen from a UNICEF 2006 survey, measuring reliability of water supplies. Despite 79 per cent of Iraqis reporting connection to a water source, only 40 per cent said the source was working reliably.

Dr. Naeema Al-Ghasser, WHO Representative for Iraq, said that the situation could worsen with the approach of summer, as heat increases pressure on water and sanitation networks. She also warned of a possible resurgence of cholera, which sickened over 4,700 Iraqis during an outbreak in late 2007.

"Poor sanitation in Iraq is a dangerous conduit for disease" she said. "We can mitigate some of the risks cleaning communal water sources over the next few months and passing information to families on good hygiene practices for the home. But this is no substitute for greater investment in water and sanitation networks in the long-term."

This year, UNICEF and its partners plan to build on efforts to improve services for vulnerable families - by tankering over 300 million litres of safe drinking water to communities without access, distributing water and hygiene kits to up to 120,000 families in crisis and working with government and other Agencies to rehabilitate water and sanitation networks in nine governorates reaching 1.8 million people. Support from partners such as the European Commission has been vital to results achieved to date.

WHO will continue to build government capacity to monitor water quality in Iraq, as well as promoting hygiene education particularly for women and school children on the dangers of sanitation-related diseases and their impact on health and the economy.

UNICEF and WHO called for a renewed drive to put much-needed resources in this critical sector during 2008, the International Year of Sanitation. Sanitation is also the

focus of this year's World Water Day, upcoming on 22 March. They stressed that water and sanitation services for Iraqi families can be improved even amid insecurity, yielding results that are lasting and visible to all.

Both Wright and Al-Ghasser said more investment from the international community should be balanced by greater cost-sharing from Iraq's government to ensure families are not needlessly deprived of services.

"Adequate sanitation is central to life, dignity and development in every country, and never more so than in Iraq" Wright said. "Iraqi families need to see clean neighbourhoods and safe water in their homes before they truly believe that their country's situation will improve."

Broadcast quality footage of UNICEF's water operations is available from The Newsmarket and photography can be sourced at www.unicef.org.

Urgent Effort Needed to Clear Iraq's Deadly Remnants of War

Marking the International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action

BAGHDAD/AMMAN, 4 April 2008 – In addition to insecurity, Iraqis live amidst one of the greatest concentrations of landmines, unexploded ordnance (UXO) and other explosive remnants of war (ERW) in the world, according to UNICEF and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

With 4,000 affected areas identified in a 2006 Landmine Impact Survey, ERW contamination in Iraq is so widespread that several development programmes are being hampered. Cluster bomb contamination is of particular concern; a 2006 Handicap International report indicated that at least 55 million cluster bomb sub-munitions were dropped during Iraq's past two wars, which would make Iraq the world's most contaminated country with this deadly UXO.

"ERW in Iraq continue to damage lives and livelihoods, said David Shearer, Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General/Humanitarian Coordinator for Iraq. "They inflict lifelong injuries, deny access to productive land and undermine freedom of movement, including for the delivery of humanitarian relief. We need to increase efforts to reduce the harm they cause, and treat their victims."

UXO are of higher risk to Iraqi children, who often mistake them for toys or harmless objects to play with. A quarter of Iraq's 565 UXO victims assessed in 2006 were under 18. "The risk to children from UXO is unacceptable," said Roger Wright, UNICEF Representative for Iraq. "The damage they inflict extends beyond the physical, restricting children's ability to go to school safely and enjoy a normal childhood. Comprehensive awareness and risk education is essential as their best defence."

The United Nations is supporting Iraq's National Mine Action Authority, and other partners, to implement a sustainable mine/UXO action programme in Iraq, through UNDP and UNICEF, cooperating with experienced NGOs, including the Mine Advisory Group.

Since 2005, UN-supported activities have cleared 124 million square metres of southern Iraq, destroying 105,221 explosive items, including 15,793 cluster munitions. UNICEF also coordinates Mine Risk Education in Iraq with counterparts and NGOs. IN 2007, over 300,000 adults and children received potentially life-saving information on mines/UXO through public information drives and school programmes. But much more work is needed, particularly in central Iraq where there are currently limited funds and capacity for mine/UXO clearance.

'Clearance of dangerous munitions in Iraq will have an immediate and direct effect on the Iraqi population,' said Kent Paulusson, Senior Mine Action Advisor for UNDP. 'If we increase our efforts we can remove an additional and unnecessary security risk for the Iraqi people and facilitate reconstruction of contaminated communities.'

The United Nations urges adherence to and implementation of all relevant treaties on ERW, especially the Anti-Personnel Mine-Ban Treaty, Protocol V on Explosive Remnants of War of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons and the new Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Protecting Children Against Iraq's Deadly Reminders of War



UNICEF/Arar/2007: UNICEF helps schoolchildren learn to recognize mines

AMMAN, 4 April 2008 - 12 years old Lateef from Kirkuk knows danger is still buried underneath his feet.

"We know about objects that you cannot see but they explode when you touch them," he says. "This is how my cousin lost his hand. We fear these things and we know they are still around us hiding in the grass."

Landmines and explosive remnants of war (ERW) represent a major threat to Iraqi children. Three major conflicts in the last 30 years have left deadly reminders: landmines, unexploded munitions and even cluster bombs – a deadly form of sub-munition. More than 4,000 parts of the country are contaminated, according to a National Landmine Impact survey in 2006. That would make Iraq one of the most contaminated countries on earth.

The damage of landmines in Iraq extends beyond loss of life and limbs. They can deprive an entire family of an income, deny access to productive land and undermine freedom of movement, including for the delivery of humanitarian relief. At least a quarter of ERW victims in Iraq are children. Child injuries are particularly devastating, destroying lives and making school and games a struggle.

"I feel sad for my classmate Hassan who lost his hand two years ago in a landmine explosion" Lateef says. "He stands watching from faraway because he cannot join us in sports and play. Children in our village cannot walk or play beyond the paved road lest they would step on a landmine and get hurt".

Lateef's village is particularly badly affected as a former hub of military conflict. Many of Lateef's family members, including his aunt, have lost limbs because of landmines planted by armed forces and artillery shells that had remained dormant waiting for someone to wake them up. Even digging a foundation for a new house or planning crops are life-threatening activities in many areas. Even play is dangerous.

Education to save lives

For children like Lateef, education is their only defense against injury. UNICEF is working with NGOs and communities in Iraq to run Mine Risk Education Programmes in the worst-affected areas. These programmes help children understand how to avoid ERW, and the warning signs to watch out for. Children receive information through school MRE lessons and games, through cell phone text messages and advertisements. 310,000 children, teachers and parents were reached through this programme through 2007 alone.

Sohair, a young chemical engineer, is the team leader of the UNICEF-supported MRE programme in Baghdad. She joined the programme after the war, to make a contribution to rebuilding Iraq. "I thought it was an obligation to help save many lives by these simple measures," she says.

Sohair's work reaches 4,500 children at 21 schools in Baghdad's most risky areas, which were identified by the surveys as highly contaminated with UXO as well as areas where ongoing conflict is affecting the life residents on daily basis.

MRE can be fun – and she helps children learn through drama, art and games. Together they sing songs on the risks of picking up UXOs, design magazines, write poems and tell stories. The sessions help children to socialize and share their experiences. “Children are able to express their fears which, in turn, helps them drive some of the fearful thoughts and emotions out of their heads and hearts,” Sohair says.

Information as essential as food

Eight year-old Hanan has a lot from her MRE games in school. “This is the first time we I know what a landmine is and what does it look like. Previously we were only hearing of landmines and stories of relatives and friends maimed or killed accidentally but we had never seen those landmines. But when I saw their pictures in the poster and the teacher explained it, I could easily recognize a suspicious object and avoid the harm caused by this object if I come close to it or touch it.”



UNICEF/Arar/2007: Sohair helps children learn and talk about their fears

Sohair has grown closer to children during her work teaching them how to stay safe. “This conflict has hurt children’s minds as well as their bodies,” she says. “Young children find it difficult to understand why this conflict is happening and why it has been claiming the lives of their loved ones and robbing them the happy moments they want during their childhood. I get pleasure from knowing I am helping them have fun as well as maybe saving their lives. Truly I find this programme as essential as food for children.”

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Responding to critical needs in Basra



UNICEF/Rubaye/2008: Children wait for UNICEF water in a the heart of Basra's conflict

For children in an Iraqi city paralyzed by violence, the arrival of a UNICEF water tanker in their street was an unexpected miracle. Thirsty families queued for up to two hours to fill whatever containers they could. For some, it was the first fresh water they had seen in days.

Basra, Iraq's second largest city, had been hit by intense clashes between military forces and local militias. Schools, shops and markets closed and streets were emptied. A 24 hour curfew kept families indoors and prevented them from reaching stores to restock critical supplies of water and food.

More than 3.2 million people – 50 per cent of them children - were caught up in the violence which spread quickly from Basra to Iraq's capital, Baghdad.

"We were caught by surprise and we were not prepared with enough water, fuel and food stocks," said Mohammed, UNICEF staffer living and working in Basra. "From nowhere, life came to a standstill."

Drinking water quickly became a critical need, particularly in Basra where families rely on desalinated drinking water collected from shops. As electricity to water treatment plants was cut, existing water supplies in stores and homes were quickly exhausted. Access for humanitarian agencies to deliver more water looked impossible.

Reports from people in the city and local hospitals – struggling to cope with casualties – painted a picture of a rapidly deteriorating situation. In the absence of safe drinking water, a rise in diarrhoea rates (which can be lethal to young children) was a real threat.

"We didn't know how long the situation would continue – how long we would have to hold out for," said Mohammed. "Those who couldn't seize the chance to restock during a brief lull in the fighting had totally run out of water and started to drink the salty and poorly treated water that comes from the tap. Eventually even that ran out too."

On the fifth day of violence, UNICEF found a solution. A local UNICEF team worked with a Basra contractor to deliver drinking water through water tankers to families that could be reached despite the curfew.

On the first day of operations, 50,000 litres of safe drinking water reached 1,250 to five districts in the city. Within two days, the number of families receiving water topped 2,000 and the operation was expanding to 17 sites. Empty streets in these areas were filled with families waiting for the tankers despite the fear of snipers and mortars, relieved that some assistance had reached them at last.

"It was amazing to witness this in Basra," said Husam, UNICEF team leader in Basra. "Despite the high risk and highly charged atmosphere, the water tankering drivers were as pleased as the families to work with us because the need was so great and the families so welcoming."

As well as reaching families, the operation has been able to fill the water storage tanks major health facilities including the Basra General Hospital, the Pediatric and Maternity Hospital and the Blood Bank – easing the situation inside these facilities and providing a buffer against future crises.

Despite strikes against the UNICEF warehouse in Basra, UNICEF was also able to release emergency health supplies – including trauma kits - to Basra's main hospitals in the first 48 hours after a halt in hostilities was declared in the city.

“The fighting resulted in large number of injured and sick people in the communities,” Husam said. “The health authorities urgently requested health and medical supplies, so we acted the moment we could access UNICEF stocks. We hope things will keep improving, but at least now they are prepared for any deterioration in the situation.”



UNICEF/Rubaye/2008: Some streets had been empty until the tankers arrived, bringing relief.

UNICEF retains sufficient stocks in Basra and Baghdad to deliver emergency health supplies and water for up to 70,000 families. But as conditions return to normal in Basra, families are not expecting large scale relief operations. High prices for food and water in the aftermath of the crisis in their city are still a concern – and UNICEF is responding to as many needs as it can.

“The arrival of emergency supplies to Basra’s communities and hospitals under the most dangerous conditions underlines the will and resourcefulness of Iraqis themselves,” said Dr. Alexander Malyavin, UNICEF Iraq’s Chief of Health. “They are ready and willing to act on behalf of children in crisis. All they need is support from the international community.”

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About UNICEF in Iraq

UNICEF has been on the ground in Iraq since 1983, working to bring all Iraqi women and children the essentials of a better life. Today UNICEF's programmes are reaching millions of children across the breadth of Iraq with a package of critical care. UNICEF invests approximately \$100 million each year to improve basic health services, ensure a quality education, rebuild water and sanitation systems and protect children from abuse, violence and exploitation. Every day, UNICEF's national network of staff and partners is providing vital humanitarian assistance to families in crisis and supporting reconstruction and recovery efforts. Even in the most challenging conditions, Iraq's children can still count on UNICEF to deliver for them.

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