



UN in Iraq Marks First World Humanitarian Day **Calls for Renewed Commitment to Help Iraq's Most Vulnerable**

Baghdad, 19 August 2009: United Nations agencies in Iraq today inaugurated the first World Humanitarian Day. During a press conference at the UN Baghdad Headquarters, UN agencies called for renewed commitment to meet the needs of Iraq's most vulnerable following years of conflict.

"This is an opportunity to honour those who have lost their lives in humanitarian service, highlight the devastating losses suffered by Iraqi civilians and draw attention to the ongoing humanitarian needs in Iraq," said Mike McDonagh, Head of the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

During its 62nd session in December 2008, the UN General Assembly designated 19 August as World Humanitarian Day in commemoration of the bombing of UN Baghdad Headquarters. On this day six years ago, 22 staff members lost their lives and 100 others were injured. Since 2003, almost 100 humanitarian aid workers lost their lives in Iraq while bringing assistance to others, the highest of any country worldwide during that period.

Acting Humanitarian and Resident Coordinator for Iraq Dr. Naeema Al-Gasseer said, "Since 2003, the UN has continued to deliver life-saving relief and assistance in Iraq." She noted, "Today we reiterate our commitment to deliver aid to those most in need, regardless of religion, ethnicity, age, gender or political affiliation."

While Iraq is steadily moving towards recovery and reconstruction, insecurity and pockets of vulnerability are still evident throughout the country. In the first seven months of 2009, 1,809 civilians were killed due to continuing violence, while millions lack access to basic services and 23% live on less than US\$2.20 per day.

In Iraq's most vulnerable communities, 73% of the local population is not using safe drinking water. Across the country, the daily average of public electricity supply is just 7.9 hours. Around 3 million children are chronically malnourished and only 40% of all children completing primary school continue on to secondary school. In 2009, there were over 27,000 cases of measles reported by the end of May 2009, more than 100 times the number of cases in 2007. Women's mortality rates are of particular concern; Iraq reports 84 per 100,000 live births compared with 41 and 65 in Jordan and Syria respectively.

There are currently 2.9 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Iraq and 1.7 million Iraqi refugees living in neighbouring countries. The return and resettlement of displaced Iraqis remain critical to Iraq's recovery. Despite significant returns, 340,000 to date, conditions for the voluntary, safe and dignified return of all IDPs and refugees are not yet fully in place.

Daniel Endres, Representative of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Iraq said, "The UN and key humanitarian partners are working on a range of interventions to improve Iraqis' access to basic services, including water and sanitation, electricity, schools, work places and health facilities, and protection of civilians, especially children, women and those displaced by conflict."

He concluded, "This is a critical time in Iraq's recovery. Alongside the Government of Iraq, the UN remains committed to the country's stabilisation and consolidation of the gains made to date."

For more information on World Humanitarian Day, please visit <http://ochaonline.un.org/whd/>

And: www.iauiraq.org/