



# PRESS RELEASE

## Combatting COVID-19 In Karbala: Isolation ward opens in Iraq's Holy City

**Karbala, 26 October 2020** – Coronavirus patients in Karbala can now access safe and reliable healthcare thanks to a new Isolation Ward built in partnership between the Karbala Governorate and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Iraq.

Constructed by UNDP and funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the 20-bed Isolation Ward is part of the Al Hussein Teaching Hospital in Karbala and will serve a catchment area of approximately one million people.

The Ward is one of 14 currently being established across the country by UNDP, nine of which are being funded by USAID, to support the Government of Iraq's efforts to manage COVID-19, including another 20-bed facility in neighbouring Najaf which serves an approximately 100,000 people. All sites will feature the life-saving medical equipment required to effectively treat COVID-19 patients.

Other measures under UNDP's response package to support the Government of Iraq manage the pandemic include increasing the testing capacity of laboratories, providing personal protective equipment to healthcare workers and undertaking assessments to establish post-COVID-19 recovery strategies.

Known for its religious sites, Karbala receives tens of millions of visitors per year, and while pilgrimage numbers reduced significantly in 2020, local communities are still at risk from high numbers of tourists.

"While the COVID-19 caseload in Karbala is manageable at the moment, it is not an invitation to let our guard down. We've seen how the unpredictability of the virus has devastated all corners of the globe, so it's imperative we are well-prepared and have adequate facilities set up to deal with the most severe cases," says Resident Representative of UNDP Iraq, Zena Ali Ahmad.

"We are very grateful for the continued support of our donors, who have prioritised the health and wellbeing of Iraqi communities amidst this global disaster. In particular I'd like to thank one of our

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key partners, USAID. Without their generous funding, this facility could not have been established; and to the Government of Sweden for funding some of the critical life-saving equipment,” adds Ms Ali Ahmad.

“The United States is proud to continue helping communities through building facilities like this one. We will continue to work with the Government of Iraq and stand by the Iraqi people as we face this pandemic,” says USAID/Iraq Mission Director John Cardenas.

In addition to Karbala and Najaf, isolation wards UNDP is currently establishing isolation wards in Babil, Basra, Dhi Qar, Diyala, Dohuk, Fallujah, Kirkuk, Missan, Mosul, Najaf, Ramadi and Tikrit.

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