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Interview with Ms. Simona Marinescu, UNDP economist and acting Deputy of UNAMI's Humanitarian, Reconstruction, Development Unit



Simona Marinescu, acting Deputy HRD Office

By Randa Jamal

1. Can you provide a background on yourself and what brought you to Iraq?

After the fall of communism in Romania, I have been serving my country and my government for 13 years, the most difficult years of the transition to democracy. As a young graduate of the National School of Economics, specialized in socio-economics, I began as a technical expert in the social affairs field in the Government, then became a Director and quickly after a Director General and finally served for three years as a Minister Secretary of State for Labor and Social Affairs. From that position, I ran and was elected Senator for a 4-year term, and I held the presidency of the Labor and Social Affairs Committee of the Romanian Senate. Social policies brought me closer to people and helped me to design social programs matching their needs and building a State-individual relationship based on respect and inclusion.

When my country decided to join

the international coalition in Iraq, I made a proposal to my Government to offer support and assistance to Iraq for social reforms. I continue to believe that no economic reforms can be successful without receiving constant public support, and a poor population is never supportive.

The Romanian government presented the proposal, and thereafter I was assigned as Special Envoy in Iraq, part of the technical team for reforms. After a few months, I received new responsibilities as a World Bank consultant and then as a Sector Lead for social reforms under which I had the privilege to build the Social Safety Net system, covering today around 1,000,000 families assisted by the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs with a package of employment services and conditional cash benefits. Within the same package, children of poor families are receiving a monthly allowance conditional upon school attendance in an effort of the Government of Iraq (GoI) to limit school abandonment and child labor. In parallel, I assisted the GoI in reforming the pension system for which the parliament voted the law last December. Working with the Iraqi colleagues in the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, Ministry of Finance or the Parliament was rewarding, enriching and particularly challenging. Looking at the so different Iraq today, I am grateful I had the opportunity to be part of this incredible progress.

2. What are the urgent areas that need utmost attention and perhaps reform?

A solid democracy in this country requires inclusion and opportunities

for all. Without a sound private sector, people are not completely empowered and the economic growth is slow and not sustainable in the long run. The Government is called upon at this time of a visible security improvement to come up with economic solutions that can reduce reliance on oil exports and develop sectors that can offer jobs. As we speak, a new employment survey is being released by the Iraqi Central Organisation for Statistics and Information technology (COSIT) showing an 18.2% unemployment rate and another 29.4% underemployment. 10% of the entire population is still food insecure, despite the huge Federal Budget allocation for the Public Distribution System (PDS) that is supposed to provide basic items to the entire population, estimated for 2009 at over 30 million individuals.

As the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) Iraq economist, I work with the Government for reforming the State economy and for building a functional market. As the

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Humanitarian, Reconstruction, Development Unit (HRDU) deputy, I need to make sure that during the unfolding economic reforms and security reinforcement, no humanitarian crisis occurs and, if any, relevant UN agencies' response is limiting displacement and migration and is securing the access of people to basic services.

3. There is a lot happening in terms of restructuring the HRDU, including the permanent presence of some UN agencies in Baghdad

After the dramatic attack at Canal Hotel in August 2003, the HRDU has been operating as the interface of the UN Country Team - located mainly outside Iraq - with the Government under clear mandates set by Security Council resolutions. As the security in Iraq began to improve, UN agencies started to resume activities and to reinforce their role in providing support to governmental agencies in all areas of basic services and development. In September 2008, the UN signed with the GoI the Assistance Strategy 2008-2010 marking a new partnership after almost 20 years of no formal collaboration for development. We are pleased to see every day more and more projects coming in along with their implementing UN agencies: UNHCR, WHO, UNICEF, WFP, UNIDO, UNDP, ILO.

4. Can you describe the relationship between ICI and IRFFI?

The International Compact with Iraq (ICI) is a joint vision for development that Iraq and its implementing partners put together as a framework of reforms that are crucially needed for building a professional public sector and a functional market economy in full transparency and accountability and under long stable auspices of reconciliation and peace and in full respect for human rights and for the rule of law. The UN co-chairs the ICI along with the GoI. To support the reforms, donors have created in 2003 the International Reconstruction Fund Facility for Iraq (IRFFI) comprising two trust funds, one administered by the World Bank and the other one by the UN, the latter deploying to date over 1 billion USD out of the 1.3 billion USD deposited. Summa-

rizing, the Compact is a collection of needed transformational programs while one of the vehicles for driving and funding them is the IRFFI.

5. Who are your main partners in the GoI and how do you describe the relationship?

For the UN here, every citizen of Iraq is a partner along the way to democracy and to social development. Serving people and their best interest is the unique item on the UN agenda. To strengthen self-governance in Iraq, the HRDU assisted the Government in endorsing the Paris Declaration for Aid Effectiveness. As a member of the Paris Declaration, Iraq became a partner of the donor community in full ownership of programs that are aligned with its priorities, are results-oriented and mutually accountable. With the support of the UN, Iraq is in the position to advise donors and to guide their support towards areas in real need. That's how we understand to work with all central and local authorities in Iraq for the benefit of all.

6. HRDU is involved in several areas that directly impact the lives of the vulnerable groups. What are the methods in place to measure these areas?

The response to humanitarian needs is evidence - based and is built on systematic data collection and analysis and in consultation with the Government. Human development indicators are streamlining our work to support the GoI in meeting the Millennium Development Goals. Also, I want to make clear that the UN doesn't work in isolation of NGOs and other international organisations operating in Iraq. We built consultation mechanisms that include data sharing and joint analyses to make sure our work has a common denominator. All outputs are then used for the field response that is mainly coordinated by OCHA in cooperation with WHO, UNHCR, and UNICEF.

7. What do you hope to achieve during your assignment in Baghdad?

After redesigning the social legislation and the institutional framework for employment, social safety nets and pensions in Iraq, the time has

come for me and my team to concentrate on solutions for diversifying the economy of Iraq and for creating an environment that is conducive to business and particularly to foreign direct investment. Primarily, the focus is on jobs and, mainly, on jobs for youth who currently have a 30% unemployment rate. I want to look back in full confidence that whatever has been assigned to me was done with the people and for the people of Iraq. We, as the United Nations, have the mission to revive the sense of unity and partnership within the Iraqi society and none of us considers leaving before the job is done.

Deputy SRSR David Shearer Visits the Iraqi Kurdistan Region

By: Sabah Abdulrahman

The Deputy Special Representative of the UN Secretary General for Iraq (DSRSR) David Shearer visited the Iraqi Kurdistan Region from 12 to 15 October 2008 to replicate the launch in Kurdistan Region of the UN-Iraq Assistance Strategy that was launched last August in Baghdad.

Heading a delegation of the UN's Iraq Country Team comprising senior officials from the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), the International Labour Organisation (ILO), and the Head of UNAMI's Erbil Regional Office, the DSRSR held with the KRG Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani a constructive meeting, the main topic of which focused on better streamlining the UN assistance to Iraq including the Kurdistan Region. PM Barzani stressed that while his government had sufficient resources, it needed the UN to provide the KRG with technical assistance to deal with administrative reform and better management of the resources to decentralize service provision and project implementations in light of the UN global involvement and lessons learnt. "This is exactly what the UN is ca-



DSRSG David Shearer and KRG PM Nechirvan Barzani

pable of doing professionally and we will do it", DSRSG Shearer offered.

Mr. Shearer also met with the KRG Deputy Prime Minister Omer Fatah and a number of ministers, as well as the Governor of Erbil Mr. Nawzad Hadi. The DPM stressed that boosting agriculture, educational reform and attracting investment, as well as capacity building were at the top of his government's priorities. These were the areas in which the UN could be of help for the KRG.

The delegation also had a fruitful meeting with the KRG Minister of Planning and his senior aides. The Minister briefed the visiting delegates on the UNDP continuous support for his ministry and asked for continuation and escalation of the support that resulted so far in the launch of the Donor Assistance Database and a number of other joint ventures.

Following these meetings, Mr. Shearer and the KRG Coordinator for UN Affairs Dr. Dindar Zebari officially announced in a joint press conference the replication of the launch of the UN-Iraq Assistance Strategy in Kurdistan Region. In response to reporters' questions, the DSRSG explained that the strategy was not about the allocation of certain amounts of funds for assisting Iraq. *"It is about stepping up coordination*

and cooperation between the UN and its Iraqi and KRG counterparts for better planning and management of assistance provided by donors", Mr. Shearer stated.

Before ending the five-day visit, the UN delegation visited the governorate of Sulaymaniya where they met separately with Iraq's First Lady Hero Ibrahim Ahmed, Governor Dana Ahmed Majeed and other senior officials, as well as representatives of national and international non-governmental organizations. The DSRSG had similar separate meetings with the Governor and NGOs in Erbil.

UNAMI and MICT Launch The Voter Education Radio Program

Following the adoption of the provincial elections law, Iraq is now preparing for the holding of regional elections for governorate councils in 14 of Iraq's 18 provinces by end of January 2009.

In support of this crucial step forward in helping consolidate Iraq's political progress, UNAMI and its implementing partner, Media in Cooperation and Transition (MICT) have launched on October 20, 2008 a nationwide Voter Education Radio Programs project. This project is aimed at producing, disseminating and exchanging radio reports and features related to the elections by engaging a network of radio stations and a pool of journalists from all over the country.

The first phase of the project consisted in a four-day training course during which the participants acquired techniques of election coverage provided by a journalist trainer with experience in the field. This section also included working sessions on how to select suitable topics and interview partners, as well as methods to meet basic norms of



Eliana Nabaa, Deputy Chief of UNAMI's Public Information Office and Klaas Glenewinkel, MITC manager concluding the media training in Erbil

election coverage such as balance, fairness, and accuracy.

The second part of the training was dedicated to all information relevant to the provincial elections such as party profiles, procedures, organizational backgrounds and campaign issues. The section was run by elections experts. The last day of the gathering was used to clarify details of the joint production period. The training was conducted by MICT in Erbil, between October 10 and 13.

Key goals of the project strive to increase transparency and inclusiveness in the electoral process and to encourage informed debates among citizens in the run-up to and aftermath of the election. The strategy to reach these goals is the dissemination of objective, impartial and balanced information throughout the country on campaign issues and political debates; parties and candidates nominated for elections; political role and authority of governors and provincial councils and their relation to the central government; technical and procedural details of the voting process; election results and results from election monitoring.

In Iraq, where political tension is strong and readiness to boycott elections or deny election validity is high, voter education is crucial for the success of elections in terms of participation and approval. Parties need channels of communication and voters need information on parties. A successful election also depends on public awareness, because the availability of high quality content information prevents voters from feeling disenfranchised, while media representation prevents parties from becoming marginalized.

The “Distance Learning Project”: an Iraqi Educational TV Channel



Setting the Transmission Unit

The Iraqi Ministry of Education, in partnership with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) launched on October 19, the Iraqi Educational Television Channel.

The Minister of Education, Dr. Khudair Al Khuzaa'i ushered the first official broadcast of the Iraqi Educational TV Channel, dubbed *IRAQI EDU*, which airs on *NILE-SAT*, at 10775hz, on Sunday 19th of October 2008 at 17:00 (5:00 pm) Baghdad time.

The “distance Learning Project” aims at supporting the efforts of the Ministry of Education in providing quality primary and secondary education and a better future to out of school students, school enrolled students, the internally displaced and refugee students. It will also highly benefit school age girls and students with special needs.

The educational TV programs are based on the Iraqi school curricula and are broadcast repeatedly 24 hours a day through satellite. While the *IRAQI EDU* Channel is not a substitute for school but rather aims to be a supplementary educational resource, this educational tool will overcome the deteriorating security and economical

conditions as well as time and space, and will provide students with a chance to start or resume their studies. The project gives priority to serving students of grades 6, 9 and 12 (transitional grades).

With messages promoting ethical values such as peace and tolerance also present in the programming, this initiative aspires to contribute to peace-building and reconciliation in the country.

It will also help building the capacity of teachers and educational specialists in Iraq, as it operates with a pool of 33 Ministry of Education educational specialists built on preparing, scenario writing and presenting Educational TV programs; 20 Ministry of Education technical staff, built on using and managing the TV broadcasting system, as well as on a TV library / archiving system. The production of educational TV episodes is done in cooperation with Iraqi Media Network (IMN).

The *IRAQI EDU* Channel is being implemented by UNESCO in cooperation with the Iraqi Ministry of Education and is funded by the European Union, through a generous contribution to the Iraq Trust Fund.

Latest Information Up to 29 October on the Cholera Outbreak in Iraq

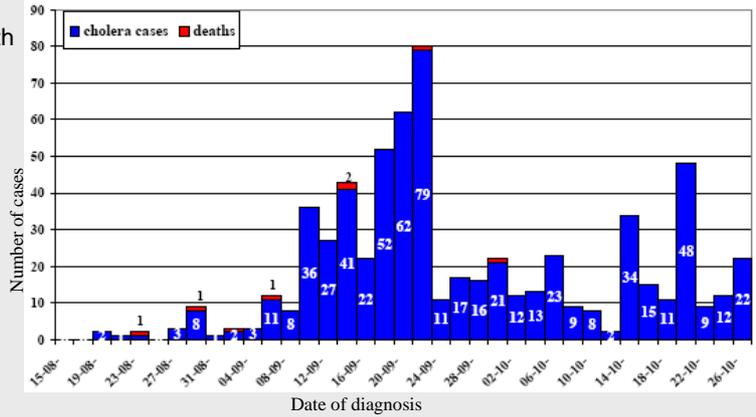
1. Current Status

- The recent report of Iraq Ministry of Health indicates that 644 laboratory-confirmed Cholera cases have been detected and registered in Iraq, up to 29 October 2008.
- All the new confirmed cases were from Baghdad, Basra and Muthana .
- 52% of the cases are found in children below 5 years of age.
- There have been 8 deaths (6 males and 2 females). 50% of the deaths have been in below 5 year old children.
- Epidemiological findings have indicated that contaminated water is the most probable source of the outbreak.
- 643 cases have been identified as Inaba and 1 case as Ogawa serotypes.

2. Summary

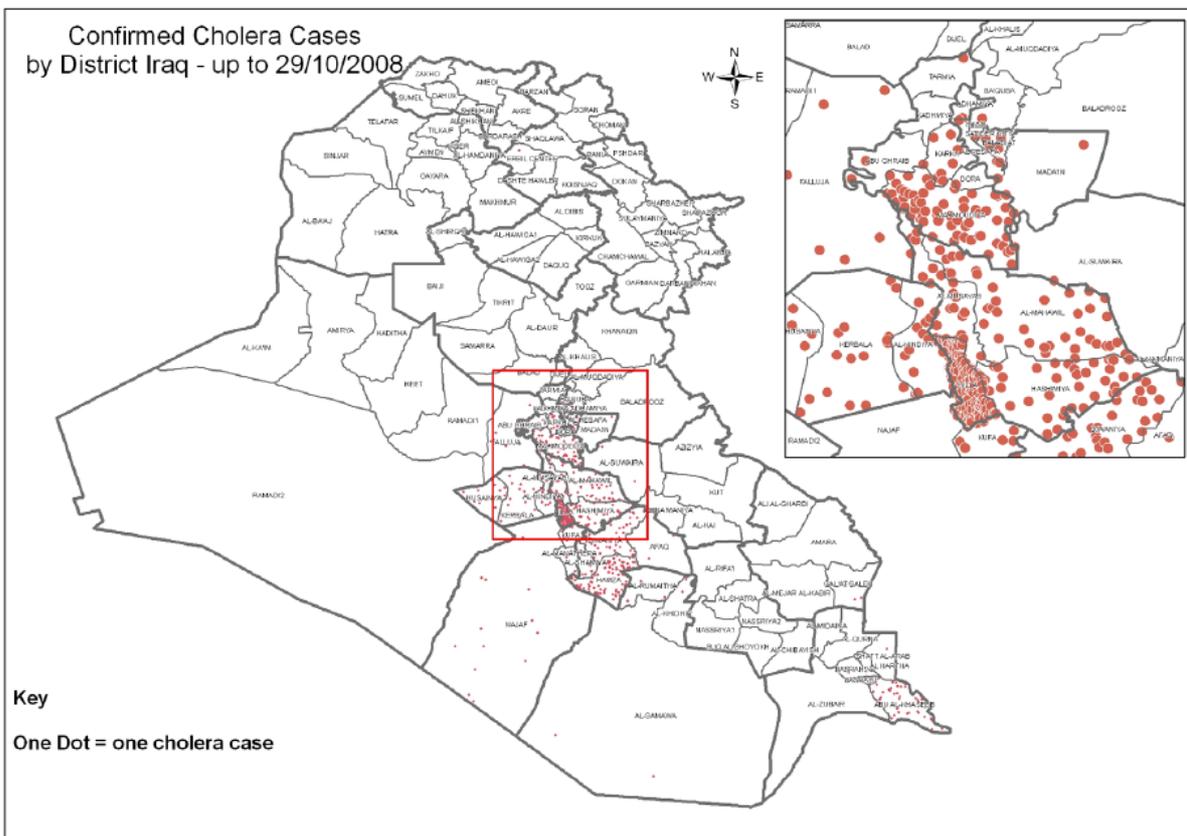
- Table (1) Suspect, confirmed cholera cases, death and dates of the first, most recent reported case by province, Iraq, 10 cases have been confirmed in last 24 hours:

Fig.1 Reported cholera cases and deaths by date of diagnosis, Iraq 14/08-26/10/2008



Province	No. districts affected	Date first case	Date most recent case	Death	Under investigation	Laboratory confirmed cholera
Diala	1	09-09-08	09-09-08	0	0	1
Wasit	1	30-09-08	18-10-08	0	0	2
Erbil	2	07-10-08	07-10-08	0	0	2
Muthana	1	07-10-08	26-10-08	0	0	7
Missan	1	07-08-08	28-08-08	1	0	3
Anbar	2	07-09-08	01-10-08	0	0	8
Najaf	3	17-09-08	22-10-08	0	10	23
Kerbala	3	05-09-08	19-10-08	0	12	43
Basra	5	14-09-08	19-10-08	1	2	58
Baghdad	11	18-08-08	29-10-08	1	1	84
Diwanyia	4	20-09-08	21-10-08	2	22	158
Babil	4	28-08-08	20-10-08	3	15	255
Total	37	07-08-08	29-10-08	8	62	644

Table (1)



Information obtained from the Health and Nutrition Sector Outcome Team (HNSOT) Lead and OCHA

OCHA and UNICEF Conduct Disaster Preparedness Training for Iraqi NGOs and Governorates



Snapshot of group discussions at the workshop.
Photo by: UNAMI PIO

By Eli Smette, OCHA Iraq

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) conducted a three-day workshop on disaster management in Erbil, between 7 and 9 October. Representatives of national humanitarian organizations and Government Emergency Cells (GEC) from across Iraq participated.

The workshop is the first of its kind to be conducted by OCHA and UNICEF inside Iraq. It offered an opportunity to enhance coordination and cooperation between the United Nations,

national humanitarian organizations and government agencies specialized in the field of emergency response.

"For a long time, national NGOs have been operating alone and isolated in remote areas of Iraq. The workshop has for the first time brought them together", said one participant. One of the workshop sessions was dedicated to discussion of NGOs and GECs' recommendations on how to strengthen the coordination mechanisms in emergency situations between all national humanitarian actors.

20 participants including 12 representatives from humanitarian organizations together with representatives of GECs in the governorates of Kerbala, Wassit, Missan, Thi Qar, Erbil, Suleiymanya and Dahouk participated in the workshop. Participants are working in the sectors of food, non-food items, water, environmental sanitation, education and health.

The workshop comes at a time when many UN agencies aim at increasing their presence inside Iraq.

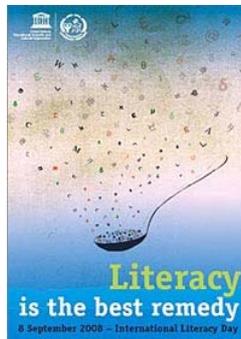
"Stronger UN presence will help in bringing about reconciliation in the country as a result of the development support that UN provides. It will also bring about political reconciliation and respect for human rights", said Dr. Dindar Zebari, Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) Coordinator for UN Affairs, during his opening address.

Participants were given an introduction to the UN humanitarian system, the Humanitarian Reform and the UN cluster approach in the field. They were also introduced to International Humanitarian Law and humanitarian principles.

In preparation of a simulation exercise, participants were familiarized with basic planning and contingency principles and were presented with a fictional emergency scenario, to which they made a response plan.

The workshop also introduced themes such as rapid assessment of humanitarian emergencies, monitoring and evaluation of emergency interventions, the Code of Conduct for humanitarian workers and the issue of prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse in the context of humanitarian emergencies.

International Literacy Day 2008



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UNESCO supports the efforts of the Government of Iraq in addressing the illiteracy problems throughout the country through its programmes: Literacy Initiative for Empowerment (LIFE) and Literacy Assessment and Monitoring (LAMP), and provides its support to the National Literacy Campaign in Iraq.

UNAMI Focus

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