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## REPORT BY THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL ON THE CULTURAL AND EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN IRAQ

### SUMMARY

This document is presented in compliance with 175 EX/Decision 46. It summarizes progress achieved by UNESCO since the 175th session of the Board in implementing assistance in favour of Iraq.

Decision proposed: paragraph 29.

## INTRODUCTION

1. This document reports on progress achieved by UNESCO in contributing to ongoing reconstruction and development efforts by the United Nations in Iraq since June 2006 when the Executive Board last examined a report on this item. The report also provides information on the Organization's support, within its fields of competence, to the ongoing constitutional review process carried out by the Iraqi authorities with a view to creating conditions for the improved implementation of the Constitution adopted by referendum in 2005.

2. The period of reporting was characterized by a highly volatile security situation despite stepped-up security measures. Escalating sectarian violence, as well as violence targeting journalists, artists, academics, teachers and students were of particular concern to UNESCO. On 13 June 2007, a second bombing at the Al-Askari Shrine in Samarra destroyed two 36-metre high minarets. The first bombing, which occurred in February 2006, had destroyed the golden dome of the shrine and sparked inter-sectarian violence throughout the country. The second bombing is stirring fears for renewed inter-community tensions, including further attacks on religious sites and monuments. The phenomenon of targeted violence affecting professionals and academics continued, with over 830 documented murders of university academics, medical doctors, journalists, media workers, lawyers, as well as teachers and students. Through advocacy, research and the development of professional support and solidarity networks, UNESCO sought to raise continuous attention on this matter within the international community.

3. The number of displaced populations both internally and to neighbouring countries have reached unprecedented levels. According to reports by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), an estimated 1.9 million persons are now internally displaced and 2 million have left Iraq temporarily for neighbouring countries. This situation creates important humanitarian needs as large population groups suffer from problems of access to basic services. Of particular concern to UNESCO is the continued access to education for displaced schoolchildren, as well as the conditions and status of Iraqi teachers and academics who have left the country.

4. In response to the prevailing situation, the international community, including the United Nations, strengthened assistance to the Government of Iraq in its efforts to advance stabilization and reconstruction. In March 2007, the fifth **Donors Conference of the International Reconstruction Fund Facility for Iraq (IRFFI)** met in Istanbul, Turkey, and decided to extend the IRFFI, including the UNDG Trust Fund for Iraq, with adequate levels of support from the donors. In order to ascertain Iraqi ownership and participation in the funding mechanism, the Conference agreed to set up an IRFFI Secretariat in Baghdad, to be co-chaired by the Iraqi authorities. Another important milestone of closer partnership between the Iraqi authorities and the international community, was the official launch of the **International Compact with Iraq (ICI)** in May 2007. The "international compact" between Iraq and its partners sets out the Government of Iraq's agenda for the next five years with regard to economic and social reform, in line with the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and other internally agreed development goals and standards. Future international assistance to Iraq will be channelled to meet these priorities set by the Iraqi authorities themselves.

5. In April 2007, the UNHCR hosted an international conference on **Humanitarian Needs of Refugees and Internally Displaced People in Iraq and the Region**. The purpose was to alert the international community to the humanitarian dimensions of the displacement of populations inside Iraq and to neighbouring countries and to forge an international humanitarian partnership to alleviate the impact of the crisis. UNESCO participated in this Conference and, as mentioned above, drew special attention to the challenges of providing access to education to Iraqi schoolchildren, especially those who have left for Jordan and Syria. Following the Conference, UNESCO has been working closely with the Ministries of Education of Iraq, Jordan and Syria and in coordination with other United Nations agencies to secure continued access to education to displaced children, notably by establishing a radio and television distance learning structure and by allowing completion of end-of-school-year exams for Iraqi students in Jordan and Syria.

6. In accordance with United Nations security policy, the UNESCO Office for Iraq continued to operate mainly from Amman (Jordan). Constant interaction with Iraqi counterparts, including line ministries concerned and the Iraqi National Commission for Education, Science and Culture, was maintained both through video/teleconferencing or regular face-to-face meetings in Amman with Iraqi senior officials. This allowed for thorough consultation and continued cooperation in project planning and development. Project implementation relies extensively on a network of national staff, qualified contractors and NGOs operating inside Iraq. Despite the fact that the security situation posed inevitable constraints to operational action, UNESCO has been maintaining one of the highest implementation rates among all United Nations agencies operating in Iraq (70%). During the period of reporting, six new UNESCO projects were approved for funding under the UNDG Trust Fund for Iraq for a total amount of US \$15.5 million.

## EDUCATION

7. During the period under review, education remained the main area of UNESCO assistance to Iraq. Assistance focused on capacity-development of the Ministry of Education (MoE), of the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MoHESR), as well as of the provincial directorates to support educational planning and management, as well as effective service delivery. Within the United Nations Country Team for Iraq based in Amman, UNESCO continued acting as deputy cluster coordinator for Cluster B (Education and Culture), chaired by UNICEF. UNESCO was also an active member of the Education Sector Working Group (SWG), which meets in Baghdad under the chairmanship of the Iraqi Minister of Education (MoE).

8. UNESCO started three new projects in the field of education, one on **Training of trainers in teacher education for sustained quality education** (\$2.3 million), and one **ICT in education** (\$1.9 million) thanks to contributions from the European Commission (EC) through the UNDG Trust Fund. The third project, also funded through the UNDG Trust Fund, is a component of the **Local area development programme** (\$30 million total), an inter-agency programme which focuses on three localized areas of Iraq. The programme aims at working with local partners to stimulate local economic development, generate short-term and sustainable employment using labour intensive approaches and improve the service delivery capabilities of local authorities in the three selected areas. UNESCO's activities within the programme (\$3.23 million) focus on strengthening capacities for delivering opportunities for vocational training. Finally, several projects approved in 2004 were operationally completed in December 2006, while three projects are still ongoing.

9. The following three projects funded by the UNDG Trust Fund for Iraq were completed:

- **Textbooks quality improvement project** (\$7.1 million, EC funds under UNDG Trust Fund). Following the successful completion of the printing and distribution of 9 million school textbooks in March 2006, focus was put on strengthening in-country capacities for future textbook development. Hence, a Prepress Centre was set up in Baghdad and training organized for MoE staff on the principles of writing and designing textbooks. UNESCO also established a Textbooks/CDs Library, and contributed to the formulation of a National Textbooks Printing and Distribution Policy.
- **Education management information system – EMIS** (\$1.5 million, earmarked funds to UNESCO from Japan through the UNDG Trust Fund). As a direct result of the equipment and capacity-building provided under this project, the educational data for four directorates have been compiled and the EMIS was used to develop indicators and produce statistical reports. The instructional material developed earlier in cooperation with the Open University Worldwide was translated into Kurdish and made available in July 2006.
- **In-service training of secondary-school teachers of science, mathematics and English language** (\$2.35 million, funded by Japan under the UNDG Trust Fund). By March 2007, the "Institute of Educational Training and Development" at the MoE in Baghdad had been fully equipped with film, projection and editing material for classroom observation for

teacher training purposes. Training material was also produced and mentors trained on the use of new material and methods in intermediate and secondary schools.

10. Ongoing projects included:

- **Training of trainers in teacher education for sustained quality education** (\$2.3 million, EC funds under the UNDG Trust Fund). Under this project, five of ten master trainers in peace, democracy and human rights are currently studying in Turin, Italy. Master trainers in English language and in computer skills attended training courses in Amman in March 2007. The first Teacher Training Network for Iraq (TTNI) Steering Committee meeting took place in May 2007, with a view to launching the Teacher Training Network for Iraq, establishing a work plan for the implementation of the remaining capacity-building programmes under the project and formulating a national strategic action plan for teacher training in Iraq.
- The project **Strengthening secondary education in Iraq** (\$4.7 million, EC funds under the UNDG Trust Fund) focused on training on specific aspects related to the reconstruction and reform of secondary education, such as: low-cost equipment for science education; laboratory skills and competencies for science teachers, library supervision, and the development of science experiment manuals. As a result, teacher experiment manuals in physics, chemistry and biology were developed. Also, furniture, equipment and materials for science laboratories and school libraries are being provided and installed.
- The **Literacy and life skills development project** (\$2.3 million, earmarked funds to UNESCO from Japan through the UNDG Trust Fund). One national literacy resource centre (NLRC) in Baghdad and three community learning centres (CLCs) in the cities of Baghdad, Dyala and Samawa have been established, including refurbishment of the centres and provision of furniture and equipment. A training for non-formal education (NFE) facilitators, animators and volunteers on the function of CLCs and NLRCs was organized (Cairo, July 2006), and so was an expert group meeting to formulate the national NFE policy paper (Amman, December 2006).
- **Revitalization of technical and vocational education and training in Iraq** (\$3 million, funded by Japan and the European Commission under the UNDG Trust Fund). MoE instructors were trained on programme design and review of equipment specifications, while training material was prepared by international experts for the following vocational disciplines: electronics, sewing, agriculture, communication, electrics, automotive, mechanics, food service and production and construction. UNESCO is currently in the process of delivering the last lots of supplies and equipment to the MoE, which are expected to be distributed and installed in the different vocational centres by September 2007.

11. In the field of higher education, all activities under the “**International Fund of higher education in Iraq**” are being completed. The Fund, which benefited from a generous \$15 million donation from the First Lady of Qatar, was a major contribution to the reconstruction of main universities in Iraq, through the provision of equipment for laboratories, reference materials to libraries and textbooks to students. In addition, more than 300 short-term fellowships were granted to university professors and students, of which 157 have already completed their programme and are back in Iraq with new knowledge and skills.

## CULTURE

12. Following the first bombing of the **Holy Al-Askari Shrine in Samarra** on 22 February 2006, UNESCO launched several preparatory activities to protect the damaged site through urgent preventive works. In February 2007, agreement on the nature and scope of the preventive works had been reached with all parties concerned and funding was received from the European Commission

under the UNDG Trust Fund (\$5.4 million) and the Government of Iraq through a self-benefiting funds-in-trust (\$3 million). In addition, the Government of Iraq committed itself to put in place all necessary security arrangements to allow the selected contractors to work in Samarra. Preventive works at the site were expected to start in July 2007. In parallel, UNESCO continued to provide technical assistance to the Iraqi State Board of Antiquities and Heritage in the elaboration of the nomination file of “Samarra Archaeological City”. Within the framework of the Nordic World Heritage Foundation (NWHF) funded project, two workshops were organized to train Iraqi experts for the preparation of the nomination file, which was submitted to the World Heritage Centre on 1 February 2006, for consideration by the World Heritage Committee at its 31st session in 2007. The World Heritage Committee decided to inscribe the site on the World Heritage List and on the List in Danger.

13. Regrettably, a second devastating bombing resulted in the destruction of two of the shrine’s minarets on 13 June 2007. As indicated in the press release issued in the immediate aftermath of the bombing, UNESCO remains committed to the reconstruction process and cooperation with Iraqi counterparts to this end.

14. In the follow-up to the recommendations of the two working meetings on the site of the **Babylon** respectively in June and November 2005, a working session on Babylon will be organized in November 2007 at UNESCO Headquarters during the third ICC Iraq meeting. A full assessment of the damage caused to Babylon is currently being undertaken, combining three different components: (i) a survey prepared by Stony Brook University, (ii) a detailed report prepared by Iraqi scholars, and (iii) a documentary screening the actual state of conservation of the Babylon site. Thanks to a contribution from Poland (\$25,000), the assessment report on the status of the archaeological site of Babylon is planned to be completed before end 2007.

15. In response to an emergency request of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) related to the technical assistance for **the safeguarding of the outstanding features of the Erbil Citadel**, UNESCO provided assistance and expertise in May 2007, and is currently mobilizing funds for the establishment of the Erbil Citadel Conservation Master Plan.

16. As part of the Organization’s efforts towards **the reviving of Iraqi cultural institutions**, UNESCO organized two training sessions for talented young Iraqi students of the Music and Ballet School of Baghdad in Amman, under the title “Healing through Music”. The events gave a unique opportunity to the students from Baghdad to concentrate their efforts on improving their skills in peaceful conditions and to benefit from master classes by renowned international musicians.

17. In the context of the project on **“Restoration of the Laboratories of the Iraq National Museum (INM) in Baghdad”** (\$1 million, Japanese FIT) a second three-month training course was carried out at the National Research Institute for Cultural Properties – Japan (NRICP) and focused on capacity-building of the Iraqi staff in conservation practices and on micro-environmental monitoring. Moreover several visits to archaeological sites, museums and other institutes in Japan were undertaken from October to December 2006.

18. As part of **“Management enhancement and capacity-building in museums in Iraq”** (\$80,795, Norwegian FIT) a first working meeting was organized with Iraqi stakeholders on 18 and 19 March 2007 in order to identify the content and timing of the training workshops. The first training on museums management is scheduled to take place for three weeks, starting 29 July 2007.

## SCIENCE

19. UNESCO continued its active participation in the United Nations Country Team for Iraq’s Cluster A on “Agriculture, Food Security, Environment and Natural Resources Management”, playing a leading role in capacity-building on water resources management and on environment issues in close coordination with UNEP.

20. In the field of water management, assistance focused on enhancing technical capacities of water experts and strengthening institutional capacities in integrated water resources management, both through the UNDG Trust Fund project described below and in the context of the Organization's regular programme activities. The project "**Capacity-building of water institutions in Iraq**" (\$3.2 million, funded through the UNDG Trust Fund), was fully completed at the end of 2006. The project involved the participation of some 300 Iraqi water experts in a variety of capacity-building activities: 18 training courses, six workshops, one study tour and several meetings and conferences were organized, involving a wide range of participation from high-level government officials to postgraduate students. In the same context, a United Nations joint water conference was held in May 2007 in Amman with the attendance of several Iraqi ministers, GoI officials, parliamentarians and academia, to discuss long-term development of water-related issues in a concerted manner. Also, water sampling and laboratory equipments as well as 350 titles of technical books and academic journals were provided to the Ministry of Water Resources. The Ministry's training centre for water experts was also equipped with necessary instruments and facilities. Within the project's scope, another major achievement was the reactivation of the Iraqi National IHP Committee, now led by the Ministry of Water Resources, as a focal point for UNESCO's water activities. In the process of implementation, UNESCO's global water network has been fully utilized for the organization of training in UNESCO-IHE, and in the Regional Centre for Training and Water Studies (RCTWS) in Egypt in cooperation with the PC-CP programme.

21. A new project, based on an interdisciplinary approach on water and culture, on "**Rehabilitation and conservation of Kahrez systems in northern governorates**" (\$1.6 million, under the UNDG Iraq Trust Fund) was initiated. "Kahrez" is the Kurdish local name of the ancient water conveyance system which has had an important role in supplying drinking and irrigation water throughout history, but which has been neglected in the last decades, leaving the historical structure damaged and unusable in the longer term. The project aims at cleaning and rehabilitating selected Kahrez systems in Kurdistan governorates, thus creating local short-term employment opportunities, as well as updating knowledge and expertise in conservation and maintenance of these ancient hydraulic systems for long-term local water management. The project also aims at integrating the Iraqi authorities within UNESCO's extensive network in this field, such as the International Centre for Qanat and Historical Hydraulic Structures (ICQHS) in Iran, which is an implementing partner of this project.

22. In the field of **Ecological and earth sciences**, some activities have been implemented in collaboration with the UNESCO Cairo and Amman Offices aimed at reviving the **Iraqi National IGCP Committee**. In this context, Iraqi scientists were invited to the regional IGCP meeting in September 2006 in Damascus, which resulted in the submission of a joint proposal on transboundary groundwater management to the IGCP Secretariat together with Jordan, Syria and the United Arab Emirates. A research paper on combating desertification is also under development by the Desert Research Centre of Anbar University.

23. **The Iraqi National MAB Committee** as well as the **World Heritage National Sub-Committee for Natural Heritage** have also been restructured, in cooperation with the Ministry of Environment. A representative of the Iraqi Ministry of Environment attended the fifth Arab MAB coordination meeting in June 2006 and was selected as member of the bureau for the coming two years. In addition, UNESCO, in collaboration with UNEP, FAO and UNDP, is developing joint project proposals for the inscription of the Iraqi Marshlands of Mesopotamia, one of the most important ecosystems in the Middle East, on the World Heritage List and the biosphere reserve site, so as to ensure its sustainable development. One of these proposals was recently submitted by the UNCT for Iraq for funding to the "Environment and Climate Change" window of the Spanish MDG Fund.

24. In the field of **basic engineering sciences**, the Iraqi authorities are in the process of applying for membership to the SESAME project. To this end, UNESCO planned an activity to strengthen their capacity to participate in SESAME during 2007. Finally, a UNESCO/ISESCO international workshop on "micro-science experiment" for Iraqi experts will also be organized in October 2007, in Amman.

## COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION (CI)

25. Iraqi journalists continue to pay a high price for the exercise of freedom of expression and the toll of journalists killed in Iraq continues to mount. The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) has documented that since March 2003, 145 journalists and media support staff, mainly locals, were killed in Iraq and that numerous abductions, harassment, violent assaults and arrests took place, making it by far the deadliest conflict for the press. This issue has been at the heart of a UNESCO-led **awareness-raising campaign on press freedom and safety of journalists culminated with the World Press Freedom Day celebrations**. Under the patronage of the Higher Media Council (HMC) in Jordan, representatives from local and international press freedom organizations discussed the legal status of media professionals in conflict zones and the current levels of impunity with regard to crimes committed against journalists. In addition, the NGO Media in Cooperation and Transition (MICT), in joint collaboration with UNESCO, produced interviews and features on the current situation of Iraqi journalists, which were provided free of charge to radio stations all over Iraq.

26. In the context of the constitutional review process in Iraq and the United Nations inter-agency project for strengthening the constitutional process and good governance, UNESCO is continuing to promote the development of a legal framework conducive to independent and pluralistic media and to assist in securing freedom of expression throughout the review of the current constitution. To this extent, UNESCO Headquarters co-hosted the **International Conference on Media Development in Iraq** in January 2007, in cooperation with the Iraqi Communications and Media Commission (CMC), thanks to the financial support from Japanese Funds-in-Trust and the European Commission. The participants included 200 Iraqi delegates, among which journalists, members of the Iraqi parliament and government officials as well as representatives of international NGOs and many donors. The Conference highlighted the need for international support and advocacy for freedom of expression and access to information, by reinforcing independent regulation of the communications sector in Iraq and by abolishing legal provisions restricting the exercise of independent journalism. It was recommended that the CMC should continue to function as an independent body with exclusive authority to license public media broadcasters and regulate their work.

27. In parallel, UNESCO has also actively engaged with the United Nations Country Team for Iraq in supporting the constitutional review process by providing technical advice on constitutional guarantees for freedom of expression and access to information in the framework of the IRFFI-funded **Constitution II UN Umbrella project**. The UNESCO component (\$1,047,039) was launched in April 2007 and is focused on reinforcing Iraqi capacity to develop and enforce a regulatory framework conducive to independent and pluralistic media. The project also includes capacity-building activities and support to encourage professional media to participate in the constitutional process and advocate for press freedom. After a three-month international competitive procurement process, UNESCO contracted a consortium lead by the BBC World Service Trust, to provide a \$750,000 package of media development services, including assistance with the legal and regulatory framework, facilitation of a code of ethics, media training programmes and public information campaigns.

28. In the same framework, UNESCO, UNICEF and UNIFEM have collaborated in preparing a joint commentary paper proposing some amendments to the Iraqi Constitution to be presented to the Constitutional Review Committee, in order to improve constitutional protection for human rights, especially freedom of expression and women and children's rights in line with recognized international standards. Also, the NGO Media in Cooperation and Transition (MICT), in collaboration with UNESCO, organized specific training workshops on the current situation of Iraqi women, with the aim of their empowerment and enhancement of their social, economic and political conditions by encouraging radio journalists to work on gender-related topics, and increase public awareness on the challenges faced by women in today's Iraq. MICT selected 30 Iraqi radio journalists and engaged them in a four-week online course designed to develop their skills in gender sensitive journalism. The service consisted of individual one-to-one training courses, a

library (with content covering both journalism techniques and women's issues) and a virtual meeting room that encouraged exchange of ideas, news and information. Reports, features and interviews that were produced as part of the training were distributed free of charge among radio stations all over Iraq.

### **Proposed decision**

29. In the light of the above, the Executive Board may wish to adopt a decision along the following lines:

The Executive Board,

1. Recalling 175 EX/Decision 46,
2. Having examined document 177 EX/64 Rev.,
3. Recalling the major responsibility entrusted to UNESCO, within the United Nations integrated response, in the fields of education, culture, science and communication, as well as its key role in contributing to democracy, particularly human rights, freedom of expression and access to scientific knowledge for the reconstruction of Iraq,
4. Emphasizing the need to reinforce UNESCO's activities in all its fields of competence in favour of dialogue and national reconciliation within the Iraqi society, as part of the constitutional review process and more broadly to promote tolerance as well as mutual respect and understanding,
5. Acknowledges with satisfaction the results achieved in the implementation of educational, cultural, scientific and media activities and the mobilization of substantial extrabudgetary resources to this effect;
6. Encourages the Director-General to give full support to the Iraqi Government in its implementation of educational, cultural, scientific and media programmes, in particular through capacity-building activities and to pay special attention to the emerging humanitarian needs of internally displaced persons;
7. Invites the Director-General to continue monitoring the implementation of the International Coordination Committee for the Safeguarding of the Cultural Heritage of Iraq (ICC);
8. Further invites the Director-General to reinforce UNESCO's efforts to address the most urgent humanitarian needs of populations most affected by the crisis, including displaced Iraqis;
9. Thanks all Member States, especially Japan, and the European Commission, as well as NGOs and foundations concerned, and in particular the Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development, for their substantial contribution to UNESCO's action in favour of the Iraqi people, and appeals to them to continue to assist UNESCO in its efforts to foster reconstruction and dialogue in Iraq;
10. Invites the Director-General to present a report thereon at its 180th session.