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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 180 EX/Decision 48. It summarizes progress achieved by UNESCO since the 180th session of the Board in implementing assistance in favour of Iraq.

No financial or administrative implications.

Action expected by the Executive Board: decision in paragraph 35.

INTRODUCTION

1. This document reports on progress achieved by UNESCO in contributing, within its fields of competence, to the ongoing reconstruction and reconciliation process in Iraq since August 2008.

2. Since early 2008, the country is no longer facing the significant humanitarian crises previously experienced, although the refugee and Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) situation remains a serious concern. However, a highly volatile security situation remains a permanent feature, continuously challenging humanitarian, reconstruction and reconciliation efforts led by Iraqi authorities with the support of the international community.

3. During the period under review, UNESCO activities in Iraq continued to be implemented from Amman in accordance with United Nations' security regulations, with a core group of national staff working in Iraq. Missions to Iraq are conducted on a priority basis as all 16 agencies, funds and programmes active in the country must share the limited number of available slots in Baghdad and Erbil. Field missions outside these areas require considerable security support, several weeks' advance planning and clearance, and are limited in time and scope. As part of the United Nations decision to increase its continued presence in Iraq, the Organization is in the process of deploying a full-time Programme Coordinator to be based in Baghdad.

4. A major landmark during this period was the first official visit of UNESCO's Director-General to Iraq on 7 May 2009, underscoring the Organization's commitment to support Iraq in its rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts. The Director-General's visit was organized in close cooperation with the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General (SRSG) and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq, Mr Staffan de Mistura, and the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) staff. The SRSG accompanied the Director-General throughout the visit. The Director-General met the Prime Minister and signed three memoranda of understanding with the Ministers of Education (literacy campaign), the Minister of Higher Education (establishment of archaeology institutes in two universities), and the Minister of Culture (restoration of the Al-Malawyah Minaret in Samara). He also participated in a round table discussion with the three ministers and the Minister of Foreign Affairs to review bilateral cooperation and identify priority areas for assistance. In addition, the Director-General also met several bilateral Ambassadors to Iraq to assess international support to the country. The Director-General was accompanied throughout his visit by Her Highness, Sheikha Mozah Bint Nasser al Missned, the First Lady of Qatar, in her capacity as UNESCO Special Envoy for Basic and Higher Education. During the visit, Her Highness announced that Qatar would be providing considerable support to new UNESCO initiatives in the areas of literacy, curriculum review, teacher training and higher education. This commitment, for a total amount of US \$23.8 million was materialized through the signing of a framework agreement on 8 July 2009 at UNESCO Headquarters with the Office of Her Highness, Sheikha Mozah Bint Nasser al Missned. Thanks to this generous funding, UNESCO's assistance to the education system in Iraq will be considerably scaled up.

5. The following information presented in this report is an update of activities in the reporting period and does not restate achievements reported in previous documents submitted to the Executive Board.

EDUCATION

6. UNESCO's assistance to Iraq is predominantly concerned with the education sector, with projects in the fields of basic, secondary, tertiary, technical and vocational and non-formal education to support the rehabilitation of the sector. In autumn 2008, with the support of the Qatar Foundation, a major international conference was held at UNESCO Headquarters, aiming to draw special attention to the plight of education in Iraq. The conference involved over 200 participants and all major partners working in Iraq; its short-/mid-term recommendations inform UNESCO's

future planning and from its action plan specific project proposals have been developed to be considered for national and donor funding.

Reinforcing national education planning and management

7. **Project on ICTs in Education:** This project is carried out in partnership with UNESCWA and funded by the European Commission (\$1.9 million) under the UNDG Iraq Trust Fund. A training centre and two pilot schools for each of the five governorates (Baghdad, Mosul, Erbil, Basra, Najaf) have been established under the project, as well as an ICT Centre for Training and Programme Development in Baghdad. Work is continuing on the development of an e-learning policy for the Ministry of Education.

8. **Project on Enhancing the learning environment in vulnerable areas in Iraq to meet the EFA goals:** Funded by the European Commission under the UNDG trust fund (\$1.7 million), the project was approved in October 2008 under a joint project involving UNICEF, UN-HABITAT, UNIFEM, WHO and HRO, UNESCO. UNESCO is supporting the rehabilitation of the education sector in Iraq through developing the institutional capacity of the Ministry of Education and its Directorates. UNESCO is also partnering with UNICEF and the World Bank to support the Ministry of Education in Baghdad and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) to develop a National Education Strategy for Iraq. A separate component involves the collaboration of UNESCO and UNICEF in the launch of a major national literacy campaign.

Rehabilitating secondary and technical and vocational education (TVET)

9. **Improving the relevance and quality of technical and vocational education Training (TVET):** This project, funded by Germany under the UNDG Trust Fund (\$5.3 million), supports TVET institutions. A TVET Governance Model has been developed and presented for official endorsement and includes programme outlines and equipment specifications. In collaboration with the private sector, the first phase of a model apprenticeship programme was delivered with national training standards, competence-based curricula, and training and skill tests materials developed for pilot programmes.

10. **Local Area Development Programme:** Funded by the European Commission under the UNDG Trust Fund (\$3.2 million). This project is implemented jointly with six other United Nations agencies (ILO, UNOPS, UNIFEM, WHO, UN-HABITAT, UNDP) with the aim of improving service delivery and job creation in three target areas (Suleimaniyah, Babil and the Iraqi Marshlands). UNESCO is reinforcing TVET capacity in these selected areas through the rehabilitation and equipping of Vocational Training Centres (VTCs); assistance with course development; and technical, pedagogical and life skills training for VTC staff. In each target area, UNESCO is also rehabilitating the science laboratories of three secondary schools, as well as providing physics, chemistry and biology equipment.

Rehabilitating higher education

11. **Fellowships for Iraqi academics:** With support from the International Fund for Higher Education (Qatar), 200 short-term fellowships have been awarded to Iraqi faculty members in host universities worldwide to help them re-establish links with the international academic community after decades of conflict and isolation. Forty of the 100 additional fellowships that remain will be dedicated to both Iraqi professors of medicine and Iraqi female academics in recognition of their specific vulnerability as targets. UNESCO is also collaborating with the Council for Assisting Refugee Academics (CARA) and Scholar Rescue Fund (SRF) to further expand the number of fellowships for Iraqi academics at risk.

12. **Teacher training project:** Funded by the European Commission under the UNDG Iraq Trust Fund (\$2.3 million). Nearly two decades of conflict and sanctions have greatly eroded Iraq's capacity to develop and train teachers. The project is helping to establish the basis of a

professional teacher-training network in Iraq, partnering eight Iraqi institutions with six international universities and providing capacity-building to approximately 300 subject experts to create a national core trainer expertise.

Ensuring access to education

13. **Educational TV project:** Funded by the European Commission under the UNDG Trust Fund (US \$5.6 million). The successful launch of the educational television “Iraqi Edu” satellite channel in October 2008 is providing quality education to Iraqi students, within and outside of Iraq, including refugees, IDPs, girls and students with special needs, by broadcasting educational television programmes 24 hours a day. Discussions are under way with the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) to have the channel broadcast in Kurdish.

14. **Iraqi school textbooks online:** UNESCO continues to maintain with regular programme funds a website which contains electronic versions (PDF files) of all Iraqi school textbooks. This programme benefits IDPs and refugees as well as the general student population.

CULTURE

15. In addition to the provision of direct assistance, UNESCO’s cultural programmes in Iraq enable decision-makers to form policies for safeguarding, protecting and promoting Iraq’s cultural assets. In cases such as the rehabilitation of the Al-Askari Shrine in Samara, these actions contribute to the promotion of reconciliation.

16. Project on the **Rehabilitation of Al-Askari Holy Shrine (Phase I):** Funded by 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). Following the two bombings of the Al-Askari Holy Shrine in Samara in February 2006 and June 2007, UNESCO prepared a pre-restoration programme focusing on urgent preliminary works. Field work began in February 2008 and a full-time team will be in place for over a year, working closely with the Iraqi Technical Committee. Phase I of the restoration is scheduled to end by December 2009. On-site progress is enough advanced to allow roughly 50,000 pilgrims per week to visit the site. When the Prime Minister of Iraq visited Samara in January 2009, he highlighted this as a positive step towards national reconciliation. This dimension of the project is a key concern to the Organization which, in February 2009, facilitated a visit of elders and tribal chiefs from Karbala to Samara. Plans are also under way to host a delegation from Najaf in July 2009.

17. Project on the **Revitalization of the Erbil Citadel (Phase I):** Funded by the Kurdistan Regional Government (\$1.475 million). The Citadel is both an important cultural site as well as a source of national and local pride. However, decades of neglect have severely degraded its condition. During this first phase, UNESCO is partnering with the KRG to undertake urgent remedial work while supporting the development of a conservation master plan and training to build local capacity in conservation and restoration. With Phase I due to be completed ahead of the scheduled date of December 2009, UNESCO and the HCECR are now preparing to launch Phase II of the project. This second phase includes both the start of major renovation works and the preparation of a World Heritage nomination file for the Erbil Citadel.

18. Project on the **Restoration of “Dar al-Wali” in Baghdad:** Funded by Turkey (\$100,000). At this stage of the project, which started in August 2008, UNESCO has prepared the restoration master plan, including detailed technical specifications of the Ottoman Building in Baghdad known as “Dar al-Wali”. This master plan will be given to the owner of the building and the State Board of Antiquities and Heritage and will be used for the mobilization of additional funds for the effective restoration of the site.

19. As follow-up to the third special session of the **International Coordination Committee for the Safeguarding of the Cultural Heritage of Iraq (ICC)**, and to the subsequent “ICC Subcommittee on Babylon”, UNESCO and the British Museum conducted a mission to Babylon in February 2009 in order to finalize the assessment report on damages caused to Babylon. The official release of the report is scheduled to take place at a press conference at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris on 9 July 2009.

20. In November 2008, UNESCO organized assessment missions of the following sites: two Iraqi World Heritage sites (Hatra and Ashur); two sites on the Tentative List (Nimrud and Nineveh); and the Mosul Museum, the most important antiquity museum of Iraq after the National Museum. UNESCO also commissioned an assessment for the museum sector of Kurdistan in April 2009. Building on the findings of these assessments, UNESCO will elaborate action plans to support fund-raising efforts of both the Mosul Museum and the KRG museum sector.

21. Project “**Restoration of the Laboratories of the Iraq National Museum (INM) in Baghdad**”: Funded by Japan (\$ 1 million). This initiative aims at restoring Iraqi capacity to manage the return and emergency conservation of artefacts looted after the fall of the previous regime. Earlier stages of this project focused on the delivery of equipment and materials to help rehabilitate the laboratories. Remaining assistance is concerned with comprehensive overseas training for conservation staff. The fifth training course commenced on 18 June 2009 in Japan and will finish in mid-September 2009. With the completion of this course, 16 Iraqi professionals will have been trained under the project.

22. Continuing the fight against the **illicit trafficking of Iraqi antiquities**: A series of workshops served to strengthen legal and operational capacities of concerned Iraqi authorities. These took place in Beirut (2-13 November 2008) in close cooperation with UNESCO partners UNIDROIT, INTERPOL, the World Customs Organization and the Special Unit of the Italian Police, in charge of the protection of cultural heritage.

23. In recognition of the need to take action to preserve the **Iraqi Marshlands**, UNESCO and UNEP are partnering towards the process of nomination for World Heritage of the Marshlands of Mesopotamia. The site is of significant mixed natural and cultural heritage and features on the Tentative List. The launch of this joint initiative will be discussed with concerned Iraqi line ministries at the workshop from 25 to 29 June 2009 in Amman.

24. Following **Iraq’s 2008 ratification of the 2003 Convention on the Protection of Intangible Heritage**, UNESCO is organizing an awareness-raising workshop from 11 to 13 July 2009 in Amman. This will serve to assist officials from the Ministry of Culture of the Central Government and the Ministry of Culture of the KRG, with the implementation of the Convention and the preparation of a national inventory of intangible cultural heritage.

NATURAL SCIENCES

25. UNESCO participates in the **United Nations Sector Outcome Team for “Agriculture and Food Security”** which covers agriculture, environment and natural resources management, and plays a leading role in capacity-building for water resource management and on environmental issues, in coordination with other United Nations agencies.

26. In the field of **water resource management**, the Strategy for Land and Water Resources in Iraq (SLWRI) Water Systems Planning model was launched at a workshop in Istanbul in July 2008. This is a planning and decision-making tool which has been funded and implemented with assistance from the United States. UNESCO-IHP contributed data for the development of the model and arranged for training for the Ministry of Water Resources on the model’s application.

27. **Rehabilitation and conservation of kahrez systems in northern governorates:** Funded under the UNDG Iraq Trust Fund under non-earmarked funds (\$1,600,628). Implementation continues in this project which seeks to empower local communities to rehabilitate selected traditional “kahrez” (well systems) in northern Iraq. The project also aims to update expertise in the conservation and maintenance of the well systems. Assistance involves training for local engineers on monitoring and evaluation techniques, as well as the provision of equipment for testing the quality and flow of water. Plans for the restoration of a model kahrez have been agreed by the KRG government and restoration is expected to begin in July 2009. A comprehensive study to locate and assess the condition of the kahrez system in the country, the first of its kind in Iraq, will be completed in late August 2009.

28. In **Basic Engineering Sciences**, the SESAME Council, meeting in its 13th session in Amman in November 2008, unanimously approved Iraq’s request to become an observer of the Synchrotron Light for Experimental Science and Applications in the Middle East (SESAME) Centre. Observer status will be confirmed once Iraq’s official notification of acceptance of the SESAME statutes has been received by the Organization.

COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION

29. Since the fall of the old regime the potential to promote and protect freedom of expression in Iraq has increasingly expanded. UNESCO works with media and the government to help foster mutual understanding of respective mandates and roles in a democratic society. Iraq is one of the most dangerous places in the world for journalists to work, with media professionals targeted and killed because of their profession. According to the Syndicate of Journalists in Iraq, nearly 300 journalists and media workers have been killed since 2003. As the only United Nations agency with a mandate to defend freedom of expression, UNESCO works with other concerned partners to support the security of Iraqi media professionals and to raise awareness of their plight.

30. **Project to support enhanced media coverage and monitoring of electoral processes:** Funded by the European Commission under the UNDG Iraq Trust Fund (\$3 million). In order to address the need for information and capacity-building to promote public access to information related to upcoming elections and electoral processes in Iraq, UNESCO is partnering with UNDP to build the capacity of three key institutions: the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC); the Communications and Media Commission (CMC); and the professional media. This will enable them to play their respective and complementary roles in providing stakeholders with timely, accurate and impartial information. The project is at the final stage of approval and is about to be launched.

31. **Good governance through support for independent and professional media:** Funded by the European Commission under the UNDG Iraq Trust Fund (\$1 million). UNESCO partnered with a consortium led by the BBC World Service Trust which sought to raise awareness among parliamentarians and public bodies on the freedom of expression. The project also allowed the adoption of a professional code of conduct for broadcast media and supported the development of media regulation in line with international norms. The project was completed at the end of 2008.

32. **World Press Freedom Day 2009:** UNESCO Iraq participated in several activities designed to highlight the role of journalism in the construction of tolerance and intercultural dialogue. In Erbil, UNESCO with UNDP held a round table to discuss issues related to media development, legislation and freedom of expression. Working with Media in Cooperation and Transition (MICT), UNESCO organized a national radio broadcast on 3 May, which focused on how journalists can promote dialogue in Iraq. Finally, the UNESCO Office in Iraq facilitated Iraqi participation in the Press Freedom Day conference held in Doha on 2 and 3 May 2009.

FUTURE UNITED NATIONS AND UNESCO ASSISTANCE TO IRAQ

33. Since 2004, UNESCO has fully engaged in the “Cluster” mechanism established by the UNCT for Iraq, aimed at undertaking joint strategic planning and programming. Within that framework, UNESCO has been one of the major beneficiaries of the UNDG Iraq Trust Fund implementing activities across its areas of competence with extrabudgetary funding totalling over \$60 million. In early 2009, the IRFFI Donor Committee decided to phase out the UNDG Iraq Trust Fund. New projects will not be approved under the Fund after 2009 and will close its operations by 2012. UNESCO Iraq accordingly sought to diversify its fund-raising activities. To date, the office has approximately \$40 million of projects to maintain the continuity of the Organization’s active role in Iraq.

34. With the focus of effort now primarily on reconstruction, the UNCT together with the United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI) is now tasked with undertaking a Common Country Assessment (CCA) in the latter half of 2009, in order to prepare for the establishment of a United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) 2011-2014 for Iraq. While this endeavour is a challenge in view of the substantial portfolio of the office, UNESCO Iraq is fully involved in the unfolding of the CCA across its areas of competence.

Action expected by the Executive Board

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

The Executive Board,

1. Recalling 180 EX/Decision 48,
2. Having examined document 182 EX/53,
3. Acknowledges with appreciation the results achieved in the implementation of educational, cultural, scientific and media activities and the continued mobilization of substantial extrabudgetary resources to this effect;
4. Encourages the Director-General to continue giving full support to the Iraqi Government in its implementation of educational, cultural, scientific and media programmes, in particular through capacity-building activities and by addressing the most urgent humanitarian needs of populations most affected by the crisis, including displaced Iraqis;
5. Invites the Director-General to continue monitoring the implementation of the International Coordination Committee for the Safeguarding of the Cultural Heritage of Iraq (ICC);
6. Expresses its gratitude to all donors 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;
7. Calls upon, in particular, donors who have channelled so far their contribution to UNESCO through the UNDG Iraq Trust Fund to sustain their funding through funds-in-trust modality in view of the planned phasing out of this Fund;
8. Invites the Director-General to present a further report to it at its 185th session.