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**press releases****USAID Support for Elections in Iraq**

Baghdad, Iraq

December 16, 2005

Iraq held an election on December 15, 2005, to elect a permanent government that will lead the country for the next four years. This national election is an opportunity for all Iraqis to choose their first permanent government and to establish a precedent for democratic society in Iraq. Supporting Iraqis in the development and execution of free and fair elections is a principal component of the U.S. Agency for International Development's (USAID's) support and assistance in Iraq.

**Participation**

While official numbers are not yet available, anecdotal reports describe the turnout as higher than in the October 15th referendum. Approximately 6,084 polling centers—a total of 30,879 polling stations—remained open throughout the day. According to U.S. military analysts, there has been a dramatic reduction in election-day violence from the January 2005 elections to the December 2005 elections.

**USAID Support to Iraq's Elections**

Building on the successes of the January national and provincial elections, USAID coordinated with the Independent Election Commission in Iraq (IECI) and supported Iraqi civil society groups reaching out to voters. Comprehensive voter mobilization and public awareness campaigns are underway. Working with an Iraqi NGO, USAID helped train nearly 15,000 independent election monitors, nearly twice the number of observers used in the January 2005 election.

**Supporting the IECI.** At the request of the IECI, USAID provided technical election assistance in cooperation with the United Nations.

- Helped to prepare a comprehensive plan and cost estimate for voter registration for election events in 2004 and 2005, which the Iraqi government used to establish their own election plan.
- Embedded 14 technical experts within the IECI who worked in full partnership with the UN.
- Provided legal expertise, which led to the establishment of the electoral legal framework that defines Iraq's electoral systems.
- Provided training for commissioners and IECI employees on election administration, logistics, voter education, public outreach, and conflict mitigation.

**Election Monitoring.** USAID has worked closely with an independent Iraqi non-governmental organization (NGO) to train and field election monitors.

- Technical assistance to train and field up to 15,000 independent election monitors for the Dec. 15 parliamentary elections.

- Trained hundreds of team leaders and officials in election monitoring based on international best practices, emphasizing changes in election regulations and the new multi-district system.

**Voter Education and Public Awareness.** Expanding on public education and voter mobilization efforts in past elections, Iraqi coalitions and NGOs are pursuing a wide-reaching public awareness campaign with USAID support.

- Distributed nearly 1.5 million election publications, including posters and pamphlets, detailing the new multi-district electoral system.
- Helped produce and broadcast 11 scheduled political debates.
- Held 743 town hall meetings reaching out to Iraqi voters on issues related to the new electoral law, polling procedures, and reasons for voting.
- Collaborated with the Iraqi election commission to ensure the delivery of public information and commodities, including voting registration kits, printing and shipment of voter registries, and voter education information.
- Implemented a comprehensive, country-wide voter education campaign that targeted Sunni Arabs, women and other minorities.

**Civic Coalitions and Advocacy.** USAID provided support and technical assistance to a broad group of politically active Iraqi civil society groups seeking to expand democracy and human rights.

- The *Participate... Protect Your Future* advocacy campaign, run by the Rafadin Women's Coalition (RWC), encourages women nationwide to become politically active. RWC's campaign has reached out to voters countrywide, producing TV and radio ads, posters, flyers, and hosting conferences to advocate the repeal of article 139 (personal status), the addition of human rights amendments, and an increased role for women in government. Previously, during the constitutional drafting period, RWC successfully advocated the inclusion of 10 equal rights provisions in the draft constitution.
- Pledge for Iraq, a local advocacy group calling for constitutional amendments on human rights, is working to reach Iraqis in every governorate through publications, radio ads, and town hall meetings.
- The Ma'an Coalition, a group of organizations representing religious minorities in Iraq, has worked with USAID advisors in advocating religious tolerance, equal rights, and broad participation in the December 2005 elections.

### **Building on Earlier Successes**

The December 2005 national elections built on the successful January 2005 national election, numerous provincial elections, and the constitutional referendum. Since 2004, USAID has provided extensive support and technical assistance to Iraqis as they work to build a democratic society.

- Trained 15,000 political party agent observers who were mobilized for the January 2005 Election. USAID also trained and deployed approximately 10,000 accredited domestic monitors throughout Iraq for both the January and October 2005 votes.
- USAID produced and distributed 1.35 million pamphlets and supplements on the constitution in both Arabic and Kurdish to educate the populace about the content and significance of the constitution; broadcasted Town Hall meetings with members of the Constitutional drafting committee on television, and produced and

distributed constitutional posters.

- Conducted 5,000 constitutional workshops reaching over 200,000 people throughout Iraq including women and Sunnis. USAID conducted 861 workshops in Sunni Arab areas alone.
- Women's rights and minority rights were also supported through various grants, including a \$500,000 grant to a coalition of more than 30 women's organizations for women's rights advocacy in a constitutional democracy; also a \$10,000 grant was awarded to a minority rights organization who successfully lobbied for the inclusion of minority rights in the constitution.
- Established the Iraq without Violence network of NGOs to monitor violence and mitigate conflict related to the elections.

The U.S. Agency for International Development has provided economic and humanitarian assistance worldwide for more than 40 years. For more information on USAID's Iraq program, please visit the [USAID Web site on Iraq](#).

Link: <http://www.usaid.gov/press/factsheets/2005/fs051215.html>

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