

## Fact Sheet

Office of the Senior Coordinator for International Women's Issues  
Washington, DC  
February 22, 2005

# U.S. Commitment to Women in Iraq

[There is an updated version of this document dated June 22, 2005, located at <http://www.state.gov/g/wi/rls/48464.htm>]

*"All of us were impressed by the high voter turnout in Iraq. Each ink-stained finger belonged to a man or a woman who defied suicide bombers, mortar attacks and threats of beheading to exercise a basic right as a citizen."-- Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, February 8, 2005*

On January 30, 2005, more than 8 million Iraqi people went to the polls in historic national elections, 18 provincial elections, and the Kurdistan Regional government election. Based on the final tallies, a 275-member Transitional National Assembly (TNA) will be elected to serve as Iraq's national legislature for a transition period, and it is expected that women will occupy 31% of the seats. The TNA will be charged with the responsibility of drafting a new constitution.

The United States remains firmly committed to the political, economic, and social reconstruction of Iraq. As part of the approximately \$21 billion in U.S. funding for Iraqi reconstruction in 2003 and 2004, the United States has allocated nearly half a billion dollars to support democracy-building programs in Iraq--including projects that specifically help women with democratic organization and advocacy. U.S. Government-sponsored programs are helping Iraqi women develop in diverse areas from literacy, computer, and vocational training to human rights education. Micro-credit facilities and workshops are helping aspiring Iraqi businesswomen, and additional funds are improving women's access to quality health care, including maternal and child health.

The United States proudly supported Iraqi women's contributions to the elections. Through grants funded by the U.S. State Department's \$10-million Iraqi Women's Democracy Initiative, NGOs provided training in political leadership, communications, and coalition-building skills to many of the women who successfully competed for National Assembly seats. Through these grants, we also reached out to Iraqi women to help inform them of the importance of their vote and to encourage them to vote. In the months following the elections, special training will focus on constitution drafting, legal reform, and the legislative process, so that women may ensure their rights are enshrined in law.

In addition to the Iraqi Women's Democracy Initiative, the State Department has created a U.S.-Iraq Women's Network (USIWN). The USIWN is a public-private partnership to forge links between U.S. and Iraqi women's organizations and to match private sector resources with critical needs on the ground. The Initiative, through grants, benefits women in several key areas: political organization and leadership, coalition-building, democracy education, media outreach, and entrepreneurship.

## **Political Participation and Civil Society**

**Political Workshops for Women.** The United States is committed to the equal participation of women in shaping the new political landscape of Iraq. The Department of State and its partners have sponsored or currently are sponsoring political workshops and related programs for Iraqi women, including:

- **Women's Participation:** In early 2005, USAID provided grants to a 400-member NGO in southern Iraq to organize a series of seminars designed to increase women's participation in political, economic, and cultural activities. The women in attendance discussed their roles in local government, education, and women's rights in new democracies.
- **Voter Education Initiatives:** Sixteen women activists participated in an all-day training session in December 2004 organized by an Iraqi human rights NGO, in coordination with a USAID partner NGO. Law professors and other prominent speakers led discussions on the participation of women in the January elections and the political process in general. Sessions provided detailed information on the elections procedures and the roles of candidates, parties, voters, and the Independent Election Commission of Iraq, as well as an overview of comparable democratic processes abroad.
- **Training Women Interim National Council (INC) Members:** A recent 3-day workshop on governance was held in December 2004 for 22 of the 25 women members of the INC. In Iraq's current transitional political environment, women are expected to play a more active role in Iraqi politics. The trainers focused on the challenges and issues that women face as members of the INC and the new Transitional National Assembly. The women trainers (including international political activists and Members of Parliament from Europe, Central America and North Africa) led a variety of sessions on legislative procedures and the Constitution; networking, outreach and media; and good governance and reconciliation.

**Women in Government.** Since the liberation of Iraq, women have held several positions of authority. The Iraqi Interim Government included six women ministers (out of a total of 33 individuals) in the following Ministries: Agriculture, Displacement and Migration, Environment, Labor and Social Affairs, Public Works, and Women's Affairs. In April 2004, seven women were appointed to hold deputy minister positions, and many women have served on district, local, and municipal councils in most other regions of Iraq.

**The Transitional Administrative Law (TAL).** The TAL, signed in March 2004, set out the basic rights of all the people of Iraq and marked an historic step toward a achieving a

democratic Iraq. Among other rights, the TAL guarantees that:

All Iraqis are equal in their rights without regard to gender, sect, opinion, belief, nationality, religion, or origin, and they are equal before the law. Discrimination against an Iraqi citizen on the basis of his gender, nationality, religion, or origin is prohibited. Everyone has the right to life, liberty, and the security of his person. No one may be deprived of his life or liberty, except in accordance with legal procedures. All are equal before the courts.

### **Economic Opportunity**

**Agricultural Training:** The United States provided a grant to an agricultural services center in southern Iraq to provide 6 ten-day long training sessions on modern agricultural methods to 240 women from marsh areas. The training will help women to improve their agricultural productivity. Grants and technical assistance to agricultural NGOs helps to build the capacity of these organizations to improve agricultural methods and provide employment to Iraqis, including women. To date, 465 women have received permanent employment and 440 women have increased their family income.

**Textile Factory.** A grant from USAID's Iraqi Transition Initiative is helping to renovate a women's textile factory in south central Iraq. This assistance will improve the factory's work environment, increase production, and provide a venue for democracy-related training sessions for local women. Over two hundred women from lower income families operate the factory. After participating in a democracy training sessions, the women organized and developed this rehabilitation initiative.

**Entrepreneurial Training.** Under U.S. government sponsored grants, NGOs offer workshops for Iraqi women on economic development, promoting women as business owners and developing networks to support women in their efforts to own and operate businesses.

**Vocational Training.** U.S. government grants to vocational training programs will help to fund sewing machines, furniture, and other supplies for women as they learn practical skills and develop micro-businesses.

### **Healthcare**

**Women's Mobile Teams.** USAID is working with Women's Mobile Teams to increase rural women's access to information to improve their health and security. The curriculum includes information about domestic violence, its causes and how to combat it, crisis intervention, landmine awareness, Islam and democracy, and family-care education.

**Facilities.** The United States has rehabilitated 72 primary health facilities and procured equipment for 600 health centers.

**Vaccinations and Nutrition.** In the first year of Iraq's liberation, more than 3 million children under the age of five were vaccinated under the Expanded Immunization

Program (EPI). EPI vaccines will eventually benefit 4.2 million children under the age of five. In collaboration with the Ministry of Health, the United States has administered the tetanus toxoid vaccine to more than 700,000 pregnant women; vaccinated more than 5 million school-aged children against measles, mumps, and rubella; and distributed high-protein biscuits to more than 240,000 children and pregnant and nursing mothers.

**Training Nurses and Midwives.** A grant to the Iraqi Nursing Association will support the recruitment and training of hundreds of women nurses and the purchase of new uniforms, bed linens, and nurses' kits. Currently, there are only 300 trained and licensed women nurses in Iraq.

## **Education**

**Schools.** As of January 2005, the United States has renovated 2,405 schools throughout Iraq. Of the 4,334,609 primary students enrolled during the 2003-2004 school year, there were 1,920,401 girls (44%) and 2,414,208 boys (56%). In secondary schools, there were 620,834 girls and 950,454 boys (1,571,288 total). Girls made up 40% of secondary students.

**Higher Education.** Five grants valued at more than \$15 million were awarded to strengthen partnerships between American and Iraqi Universities. Student, scholar, and other exchange programs have also been revived. Of the 25 Iraqi Fulbright finalists in 2004, 4 were women. In 2005, there will be 12 women among the 35 Iraqi Fulbright scholars.

**Teacher Training.** As of May 2004 more than 33,000 secondary teachers and administrative staff, including more than 17,000 females, were trained in programs funded by USAID.

**Computer Training for Iraqi University Women.** USAID sponsored a three-week training course in basic computer and Internet skills for 20 women faculty and staff from the Departments of Soil and Water Resource, Animal Science, Forestry, Horticulture, and the library. This training course is part of USAID's Higher Education and Development (HEAD) program, which helps Iraq's universities educate young people and meet international standards of excellence. The computer training is a part of a partnership between the University of Hawaii's College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources and two northern Iraqi universities to strengthen research infrastructure, academic programs, and extension training in the agricultural sciences.

**MEPI Business Interns Program.** In 2004, several Iraqi women participated in a four-month program of MBA-level training and internships at top companies throughout the United States. This program was offered as part of the Middle East Partnership Initiative, in conjunction with Educational and Cultural Affairs, and will be repeated again in 2005.