

**United Nations Observation Mechanism in Iraq, A
Briefing by Benon Sevan, Executive Director of the Iraq
Programme, to the 661 Committee
on Tuesday 25 April 2000**

Mr. Chairman,

The Committee has before it a paper on the Observation Mechanism in Iraq, prepared by the Office of the Iraq Programme in full consultation with our colleagues in the Office of the Humanitarian Coordinator in Iraq (UNOHCI) and the United Nations agencies and programmes participating in the implementation of the humanitarian programme in Iraq.

I should like to clarify at the outset that the present paper does not concern the monitoring of oil spare parts and equipment, which are carried out under separate procedures.

The observation mechanism, established by Security Council resolution 986 (1995) and the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) of 20 May 1996 signed between the United Nations Secretariat and the Government of Iraq (S/1996/356), identified in general terms the range and type of observation activities to be undertaken by the United Nations in Iraq. It reflected the concerns of the Security Council at the inception of the Programme, when most of the imports were composed of food and basic medicines.

Following the supplementary report of the Secretary-General (S/1998/90) and the adoption of resolution 1153 (1998), the Programme grew in size and complexity. In each of the first three phases of the Programme, the allocation was \$1.33 billion. It increased to \$2.05 billion in the fourth phase, to \$2.55 billion in the fifth phase and to \$4.82 billion in the sixth phase. Official phase VII allocations are yet to be finalized, but are expected to be similar to the figures for the sixth phase. It should also be borne in mind that, since the second phase, the implementation of the Programme involves, concurrent implementation of activities approved under more than one phase. In other words, the funding level for a given phase does not necessarily reflect the magnitude and the scope of the Programme implementation during a given phase.

Whereas the core objectives remain unchanged, the methods and priorities of the observation mechanism have been kept under constant review in order to meet the evolving information needs of the Security Council Committee.

Core objectives

The core objectives of the observation mechanism are set out in paragraph 35 of the Memorandum of Understanding as follows:

- (a) To confirm whether the equitable distribution of humanitarian supplies to the Iraqi population throughout the country has been ensured;
- (b) To ensure the effectiveness of the operation and determine the adequacy of the available resources to meet Iraq's humanitarian needs.

Current observation activities

Current observation activities fall into two broad categories: tracking and assessment.

(a) Tracking - this activity is undertaken to determine whether commodities supplied under the Programme are distributed equitably, utilized efficiently and as intended in the Distribution Plan(s). UN observers undertake three types of tracking:

- i. Routine scrutiny of items of interest that address basic needs (e.g. IV fluids, antibiotics, etc.) or are of current concern (e.g. first distribution of high protein biscuits in the targeted nutrition programme).
- ii. Tracking items of special interest to the Security Council Committee, in response to requests for detailed information on plans for the installation and utilization of sensitive commodities. To date, this has allowed for the release from hold of 28 contracts.
- iii. Tracking of project-related items to provide a comprehensive picture of the end-use and facilities involved, and of the observers' access to these facilities. Reporting based on this type of tracking responds to specific questions from members of the Security Council Committee and seeks to anticipate other inquiries that may arise.

(b) Assessment - to determine whether the quantities ordered meet the needs, and to provide information on the adequacy of the Distribution Plan(s) and the effects of Programme inputs. The UN observation mechanism undertakes two main types of assessment:

- i. Programme/project assessments examine the link between specific inputs and their intended outputs. These are important in determining whether quantities ordered are reasonable, given local absorption capacity. This should be useful in informing the Security Council Committee when evaluating quantities ordered for a range of commodities.
- ii. Self-contained studies provide explanations for particular programme inadequacies, identifying priority requirements, related contracts and their status at any given time.

Although countrywide surveys do not fall within the scope of the observation mandate, the Office of the Iraq Programme has given support to surveys undertaken by the United Nations agencies and programmes.

Procedures for observation tasking are illustrated in the relevant annexes to the paper presented to you, and therefore I would refrain from going into details in that regard. A breakdown of the observation visits to date is also provided in the relevant annex.

Changing focus of observation

As a result of the increased scale and complexity of the Programme, the focus of observation is shifting away from primarily the distribution of food and basic medicines – so-called relief consumables – to observing inputs relating to infrastructure rehabilitation. Paragraph 41 of the MOU made provisions for the observation of such items, as follows:

"With reference to materials and supplies [...] needed for the rehabilitation of infrastructures essential to meet humanitarian needs, observation will focus on confirmation that such materials and supplies are delivered to the predefined destinations in accordance with the Distribution Plan and that they are used for their intended purposes, and on the determination of whether these materials and supplies are adequate or necessary to meet essential needs of the Iraqi population."

These guidelines are being followed at present, but as the quantity and complexity of such infrastructure-related inputs increase the United Nations will need to field observers with the required skills and expertise, to meet the Committee's information requirements.

Improving the effectiveness of UN observation activities

(a) The approach

There are currently 151 United Nations observer posts in Iraq. These include 63 geographical observers within the Geographical Observation Unit, 13 multi-disciplinary observers within the Multi-disciplinary Observation Unit (MDOU) and 75 agency / sectoral observers. This number of observers was established in the Interim Report of the Secretary-General (S/1996/978 paragraph 30), in accordance with paragraph 42 of the MOU, which stipulates that "the exact number of such personnel will be determined by the United Nations, taking into account the practical requirements. The Government of Iraq will be consulted in this regard."

The Office of the Iraq Programme recognizes the need to utilize the resources allotted to the observation mechanism more effectively, and to supplement them if necessary. To this end, OIP has been reviewing on a regular basis the workload, the observation methodologies and criteria, the timeliness and content of reporting, and the regularity of access to end-users, in each of the sectors established in the Distribution Plans. Based on the findings in each sector, measures will be taken to adapt the capacities of each component of the observation mechanism.

(b) Immediate measures

Based on the findings to date, OIP is undertaking to:

- i. Re-deploy observation personnel from sectors where coverage has established that distribution is reasonably effective (e.g. food sector) to sectors where the range of observation requirements is increasing.
- ii. Employ specialist consultants to increase the effectiveness of the tracking and programme assessment in those sectors where a greater array of expertise is needed.
- iii. Centralize all observation activities under a single UNOHCI manager, to increase the level of coordination and planning, and ensure better access to end-user facilities and timely provision of escorts by the Government
- iv. To develop special observation procedures to provide Committee members with regularly updated information on the results of tracking for items of special interest. This may involve providing members of the Committee with access to a tracking database.

- v) Tighten rotation schedules for observers to ensure that all posts are filled at any given period.

Observations

As OIP undertakes to make the above adjustments to the observation mechanism, it would be helpful if the Security Council Committee could consider the following proposals:

(a) Upgrading data management systems at Iraqi Government facilities and warehouses would significantly improve access by the United Nations to reliable baseline data and would likely improve the efficiency of the Government's distribution systems. OIP will continue to ensure that the Committee is informed of what applications relate to this need

(b) It would be very useful for OIP to receive more precise information regarding the Committee's concerns about the end-use of particular items contained in applications placed on hold. This will allow OIP to adapt its observation activities to the information needs of the Committee.

(c) In preparing for this presentation, the OIP has consulted informally with interested members of the Committee. These exchanges are useful as they allow for a greater level of informed discussion with Committee members on the focus and findings of UN observation activities. OIP looks forward to further consultations of this nature.

(d) It is hoped that **improvements** in the observation mechanism in Iraq, coupled with other efforts to review the information requirements of the Committee, will result in a reduction in the number of contracts on hold, especially in those cases where the reasons for the holds relate to the provision of technical specifications and end-user information.

While I have the floor, I should like to give assurances to all concerned that the Office of the Iraq Programme, together with all our colleagues in the field, is fully committed to taking all necessary steps to improve the efficiency of the UN observation mechanism with the objectives set out in resolution 986 (1995) and the Memorandum of Understanding, and to make all necessary improvements in order to address the concerns recently expressed by members of the Security Council Committee.

I should also like to assure you, that we will intensify further our interaction with the Committee and provide members of the Committee with all necessary information as well as well as required assurances that all supplies authorized for procurement, including potential dual-use items and/or spare parts and equipment are indeed utilized for the purpose for which they have been

authorized. Such assurances are essential in order to reduce the excessive number of holds placed on applications.

We are fully committed to improve and strengthen our good working relationship with the Government of Iraq in order to enhance the effective implementation of the Programme. To this end, we will discuss with the Government of Iraq how the access of our observers to end-users and end-use facilities can be improved. This includes the timely provision of escorts by the Government.

However, the Office of the Iraq Programme alone, cannot achieve this objective without the full cooperation of all parties concerned, be they members of the Security Council Committee, the Government of Iraq or the permanent or observer missions to the United Nations who forward applications to the Office of the Iraq Programme.