



United Nations Children's Fund
Fonds des Nations Unies pour l'enfance
Fondo de las Naciones Unidas para la Infancia

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Thank you very much for visiting UNICEF assisted projects during your April trip to Iraq and sharing some of the concerns we and our partners have in implementing a major humanitarian programme in the country.

Many thanks as well for offering to raise the issue of the contracts that are on hold by the members of the 661 Committee, including the United States.

We believe that the increasing deterioration of the country's water supply and sanitation systems and its effects on the health of children are linked with the increasing number of contracts that are placed on hold in the water and sanitation (WES) sector. Consequently, diarrhoeal diseases, the prime killer of children under five years of age, have reached epidemic proportions in Iraq. A study conducted in 1997 revealed a diarrhoea incidence of 14.4 episodes per child per year, nearly a four-fold increase from the level of 3.8 episodes per year found in 1990.

Last year, over 125,000 cases of diarrhoea were admitted to hospitals, and over 475,000 cases were treated at the PHC centers, the majority of whom were children under five years of age. Also during summer of last year, the country witnessed an outbreak of cholera with over 2,400 cases, over 5,400 carriers and 34 deaths. Cholera has also re-surfaced this year, with 6 cases reported to date. Based on the epidemiological pattern in Iraq, incidence of cholera is expected to peak in late June/July.

It is worth noting that in April 2000, 5 contracts relating to *purification chemicals and chlorine gas* previously put on hold by the United States were lifted as a result of our advocacy. Nevertheless, currently there are 56 WES contracts valued at US\$137.63 million that are on hold. In keeping with your request for additional details regarding these, I would like to emphasize the urgency for release of 18 priority contracts worth US\$65.3 million that can reduce the vulnerability of Iraqi children to the risks of diarrhoea and other health hazards resulting from the present drought. The priority contracts are categorized in the following descending order:

- *Purification chemicals, chlorine gas*, is the only disinfectant used in Iraq for water treatment, therefore, indispensable for purification of water.
- *Chlorinators and chemical dosing pumps* ensure safe and controlled doses of chlorine in treated water. When holds are lifted these contracts will benefit 300 water treatment plants and 1.5 million people.
- *Water tankers* are urgently needed to help mitigate the on-going drought, especially in the hardest hit rural areas.

- **Complete water projects** will provide relief to 2 million rural and urban populations who currently have no means of potable water.
- **Water and sewage network** has great potential for reducing health hazards resulting from broken water pipes and sewage pipes.
- **Jetting vehicles** will help reduce health hazards caused by flooding of residential areas with raw sewage.

Of these 18 priority contracts, 11 are on hold by the US only, one by the UK only and 6 jointly by the US & the UK. Annex 1 to this letter provides further information.

The concern over possible dual-use of some of the items is understandable. However, there is a full-fledged three-tier UN observation mechanism tracking the movement of sensitive items in Iraq. As part of this system, UNICEF's own water and sanitation observers track the distribution and use of approved commodities to assess if they are being used for the intended purpose by the intended end user. Each cylinder of chlorine gas, for example, is given a unique serial number, tracked to its end use and accounted for even as the empty cylinder is loaded on trucks for refilling.

I believe that there is much that can be done by both the international community and the Government of Iraq to bring about an improvement in the situation of children and women in Iraq today. In particular, your continuing advocacy efforts for release of the priority WES contracts on hold will contribute significantly to our efforts to seek reduction of water-borne/related diseases that currently pose a serious threat to the survival of Iraqi children.

Many thanks for your leadership on numerous fronts!