

**Speech of Her Excellency Nesreen M. Sideek-Barwari**  
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Thank you for this opportunity to speak about what’s happening today in Iraq. Thank you for your interest and for coming. I would like to speak briefly and look forward to your questions.

I left Baghdad last Friday on a small plane that took off very low, then suddenly spiraled high. For security reasons, it’s still difficult traveling out of Iraq. Non-stop service from Baghdad to Boston, or Washington, is still too much of a dream.

Saturday and Sunday I attended a UN-Habitat conference in Amman on urban development in Iraq. Monday I had meetings all day with World Bank officials here in Washington discussing infrastructure and capacity building needs. Tuesday, yesterday, also here in Washington, I spoke at a “Rebuilding Iraq Conference” for the private sector to encourage businesses to become involved in Iraq.

And here I am today to talk about my work and the status of reconstruction, political transition, security, economic revitalization, and the status of women.

I mention these events to highlight the attention from all sectors – both private and public – that Iraq continues to receive. The making of a new, better Iraq has only just begun. The momentum is still building and needs to keep going for at least three years. It will take that long for the Iraqi people to see and feel the results of the change that formally began almost a year ago on April 9<sup>th</sup> 2003.

My Ministry of Municipalities & Public Works provides essential services, what you call utilities. Iraq's utilities are owned and operated by government. Iraq has been excessively decentralized. Baghdad makes the decisions for local governorates to implement. But we are changing this to bring government closer to the people. Decentralization is a primary goal.

My Ministry focuses on over 300 municipalities in all 18 governorates. More than 70% of Iraq's 25 million citizens live in municipalities. We provide municipal services, all basic municipal services, except electricity and telecommunications. This means safe drinking water and environmental sanitation - wastewater and solid waste management.

This also means municipal roadwork including traffic controls, and urban planning, land management, and zoning. We are responsible for the administration of some 100,000 pieces of property that include parks,

leased buildings, libraries, cemeteries, and abattoirs (slaughterhouses). We clean the streets and cut the grass.

We run more than 1,500 water treatment and pumping stations. I would mention wastewater treatment facilities but in all Iraq there are fewer than 10, and none are properly functioning. The status of solid waste management is no better.

Prior to the last war, we were part of the Iraqi Ministry of Interior. Unlike the U.S. Department of Interior, however, the Iraqi Ministry of Interior was in charge of the dreadful and much feared security services. To give essential services the attention they deserve, wiser spirits have assigned municipal services to a separate ministry.

To highlight public issues and to promote public interests, representative councils have been established in all 18 governorates (provinces) and in many municipalities. The councils are still new and under development. My Ministry of Municipalities & Public Works is a technical ministry. The Ministry has technical offices in all governorate capitals and municipalities to address issues and interests highlighted by the councils. That is the theory behind the practices we are working to put in place.

We have a tremendous amount of work to do to rebuild, reform, and reinvigorate the public service infrastructure.

What's being done to improve municipal services? To bring the three imperative services of water, waste water, and solid waste up to standard

throughout the country would require more than twenty billion dollars over ten years.

At least 50% of Iraq's population does not have access to adequate and reliable safe water supply. Since April 2003, the U.S. Government has made available more than four billion dollars to address the problem. Over 3 billion will be spent on new urban water treatment and pumping facilities, and pipes and fittings to replace leaking networks to reduce water losses. Rural water projects, and equipment to repair, replace, or rehabilitate existing facilities will also be funded.

With hardly ten wastewater treatment facilities in the country, only \$700 million will be spent on sewerage works and \$22 million on a solid waste project.

The Japanese Government is talking about making \$260 million available for water and environmental sanitation.

The German Government just completed a \$3 million project re-equipping the national water quality control laboratory. They also upgraded and outfitted the main, central workshop for repair of pumps and motors and other equipment. And they provided leak detection equipment along with pipes and fittings to reduce water losses.

Other governments and the EU are also being helpful.

It's a beginning, a strong beginning, but only a beginning.

That is a little about the work of my ministry. I will now talk a little about the security situation. Much of Iraq is very secure. The news media over focuses on the negative, especially on isolated vicious events that have caused horrendous harm.

Despite recent devastating incidents, the Iraqi Kurdistan Region where I come from is relatively very secure. U.S. civilian personnel travel freely throughout the Region. The U.S. military has used the Region for R&R (rest and recuperation). Uniformed soldiers visit the Region's markets without weapons. Touch wood, to date no Coalition personnel – civilian or military – have become casualties in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region.

Basra is blossoming. The marshes are being restored. The holy cities of Najaf and Kerbala are receiving tens of thousands of pilgrims per day.

Yes, incidents do occur, like bad accidents. But when violent episodes occur life does not stop. Traffic continues. Offices and stores stay open. Educational institutions continue to function. Life goes on. This is the real resistance.

Iraqis are very sensitive to security. They have had decades of conditioning. They take very few chances. They tend to play very safe.

One of the best indicators of security is the student situation. There are hundreds of thousands of students with tens of thousands of teachers attending thousands of schools throughout the country. Parents would not

send their children to school if they were not comfortable with the security situation. It would be very difficult to find a school that is not operating because of security concerns.

There is a lot of building, rebuilding, reform, reconstruction, and reinvigoration going on. Government and nongovernmental organizations and commercial companies are increasing in number and expanding their scope of activities. Markets are increasingly lively and expanding. The security situation is under control. Economic revitalization has begun.

Political transition is currently receiving strong attention. The Coalition Provision Authority – CPA – that governs Iraq at the moment will no longer exist on July 1<sup>st</sup>. General elections are unlikely to take place until 2005. How the country will be governed after June 30<sup>th</sup> is under active discussion. What will be the national representative body after June 30<sup>th</sup>? What will happen to the IGC – Iraqi Governing Council?

How will top executive functions be handled? Who?

What will happen to the ministers?

What will be the relationship between central government organizations and local government organizations in the governorates and municipalities?

What do I see at this point in time? First, Iraq will continue to need - to require - external assistance, guidance, support, and protection, certainly in the near term. The UN needs to play a more influential role in analyses

and guidance to demonstrate what's best for the Iraqi people. This seems to have begun.

I believe the Iraqi transition assembly needs to be significantly expanded and that a steady executive body should be put in place.

Women, definitely and without question, should play a more influential role in all representative bodies. There is absolutely no shortage of qualified women in Iraq.

The law of administration – the interim constitution – should support bringing government closer to the people through decentralization, federalism, separation of powers, and enshrining UN conventions pertaining to universal rights.

What about the role of women in the future of Iraq? Let me expand more on this topic than on others. It is nearly one year since the historic moment on April 9th 2003 that confirmed to Iraqis that we are no longer threatened by the extraordinary oppression of the former regime. Since then, during a short period punctuated by turmoil, concerned citizens have made substantial progress initiating and developing cohesiveness, and in organizing to better defend their rights and protect interests they deem vital to their future. This is particularly true of rights and interests pertaining to women.

As the development of a new, better Iraq moves forward through alarming obstacles, the role of women in our society is being increasingly threatened. For Iraq to move forward faster, it is essential for women to

play stronger contributing roles. Women need to have opportunities to more actively participate in decisionmaking. In order for this to occur, an enabling environment to promote women participation needs to be enshrined within the fundamental law of administration.

As Iraq moves toward taking its rightful place among the family of nations we should do so on the basis of recognition, affirmation, and adherence to international human rights conventions as they pertain to women.

We are afraid for the future of Iraqi women. The substance of IGC resolution-137, especially the highly questionable process by which it was passed, demonstrates how the democratic process can be so easily usurped to threaten a majority that democracy is intended to serve. Resolution-137, if enacted, would reverse many of the rights and privileges currently enjoyed by Iraqi women. In order for the fledgling democratic process to mature, women groups have organized that resolution-137 be summarily retracted.

Unique, threatening circumstances are endemic in the current social-cultural makeup of Iraq. Though women comprise more than 50% of the population, in order to play significantly increased roles in decisionmaking, I firmly feel that no less than 40% representation at all levels of social, economic, and political decisionmaking need to be reserved for women.

More than eighty women nongovernmental organizations have been organized and increasingly coordinated to protect the rights of women and promote their interests. Numerous group activities have been undertaken



and more are being planned. Countrywide opposition to 137 and countrywide support for no less than 40% representation have been well and increasingly expressed. Recently, for example, sit-ins focusing on these two issues were successfully conducted all across the country.

There are only three women on the 25-member IGC. I am not completely informed but I have heard that only two members support the minimum 40%. Both are men. We have a very steep mountain to climb!

Thank you.