



PRESS RELEASE

Local authorities in Heet, Iraq celebrate the handover of UN-Habitat projects funded by the European Union and Alwaleed Philanthropies

Heet, Iraq, June 2021 - Establishing durable solutions for displaced families remains critical more than three years after the ousting of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL),

Damaged and destroyed housing along the lack of jobs, and basic services such as water, sanitation, schools, as well as safe public spaces for children, meant that displaced families faced challenges returning home. This was further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, during which many people lost jobs, and schools were closed.

In 2019 the European Union partnered with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and UN-Habitat to implement local recovery projects in five targeted communities, including the town of Heet to encourage the sustainable return of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and enhance living conditions and livelihoods in conflict-affected governorates.

On 8 June 2021, UN-Habitat brought together Member of Parliament Sheikh Adil Khamis Al-Mahlawi, representatives from the Governor of Anbar's office, and representatives from Heet as well as Ms. Maimunah Mohd Sharif, Executive Director of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), and Ms. Irena Vojáčková-Sollorano, Deputy Special Representative, Resident Coordinator, Humanitarian Coordinator for Iraq, to celebrate the completion and tangible impact of various projects and activities on the community of Al Bakr and to inaugurate the newly created Al-Nejoom park, funded by the European Union. This was the first visit of the UN-Habitat Executive Director to Iraq.

MP Sheikh Adil Khamis Al-Mahlawi opened the ceremony by saying "I extend my thanks and gratitude to the leadership of this programme and the donors (Alwaleed Philanthropies and the European Union), who made us happy and brought us together today in Al-Nejoom Park in Al-Bakr neighborhood ... to contribute to the opening ceremony of this park to be a place of recreation and a landmark in this area. We are looking forward to more construction projects and providing services...and let's work together for this purpose."

The Ambassador of the EU to Iraq, Mr Martin Huth said: "ensuring better services to the displaced population in Anbar, is yet another good example of the EU's strong commitment to support local communities and local authorities in shaping a more inclusive and accountable development for Iraq. All the more we are pleased that activities were completed notwithstanding the difficult times during the COVID-19 pandemic. The recovery challenges affecting Iraqi communities three years after the defeat of ISIL still persist. The European Union will continue its partnership with UN-Habitat, UNDP and the Iraqi local authorities for

rebuilding healthier spaces for communities, ensuring better access to services, and continue to contribute to the long-term stability and social development of the country.”

Through the implementation of a first set of impactful rehabilitation projects on housing, water supply and open spaces funded by the European Union, UN-Habitat gained the trust of the community and established an close relationship with the authorities of Heet.

"I am glad to be here today and proud to see the results of UN-Habitat's area based approach implemented in Heet that has focused on and contributed to sustainable returns of IDPs," said Ms. Irena Vojáčková-Sollorano: Deputy Special Representative, Resident Coordinator, Humanitarian Coordinator for Iraq during her statement.

This helped to secure in mid-2020 another development partnership with Alwaleed Philanthropies focused on complementary activities aimed at mitigating COVID-19 transmission and enhancing community resilience in Al Bakr East.

“We are happy to see that our project has been completed in the town of Heet, and that residents are finally returning to their homes establishing their presence there. We thank our partners at the UN-Habitat for their work and dedication throughout this process. Today, with more than one billion people living in slums and 1.6 billion people living in inadequate housing units, it is our responsibility to ensure housing rights for all; home is a fundamental and basic human necessity,” said Her Royal Highness Princess Lamia Bint Majed Saud AlSaud, the Secretary General and member of the Board of Trustees at Alwaleed Philanthropies.

Within these two projects combined, UN-Habitat has rehabilitated 180 war-damage houses; renovated a primary school; created a new park and two sports facilities; upgraded and extended potable networks serving over 600 houses and 4,125 people; rehabilitated two water treatment plants; upgraded seven health facilities, including Heet’s General Hospital, to protect some 130,000 people among health personnel and community members in the current pandemic crisis; created over 6,500 working days for Heet residents in construction, civil works and landscaping; organised several sports events; conducted a planting campaign with a local volunteer group; provided vocational training for 120 unemployed youth and engaged Iraq contractors, community groups and local NGOs in creating opportunities for synergies between projects, job opportunities, and capacity building.

Ms. Maimunah Mohd Sharif, Executive Director of UN-Habitat said: “we very much look forward to continuing to work closely with our counterparts in Anbar, specifically the Governor’s office, the Heet Mayor’s office, the relevant Directorates and Municipality and count on your support to ensure success and sustainability of these very important projects that highlight the importance of linking humanitarian-development-peacebuilding activities to sustain peace in the long-term.” Ms. Sharif added: “it is my first visit to Iraq, and I can feel the warmness, and the warm heart of the Heet community.”

The result of the projects has not only provided improved living conditions and access to basic infrastructure, but residents have increased sense of dignity, safety and security.

Female headed households specifically highlighted the importance of solid walls and gates to provide them a sense of safety and security for them and their children, who now have a safe space to play.

The projects have contributed to nurturing even stronger ties between the Anbar Governor's office and local authorities in Heet, specifically the Mayor's office, the relevant Directorates, and the Municipality, to ensure the long-term sustainability of its planned initiatives with the objective to reach the most vulnerable people.

Anbar Chief of Governor's Advisors, Engr. Jasim Mohammed Al-Halbousi, said "UN-Habitat was present in the beginnings of liberation, as it had a role in restoring stability and enabling returnee families by securing jobs and employing young people, which had an impact on reviving the economic situation of those areas. The local government took upon itself the responsibility of restoring stability, returning the displaced, and securing the minimum services as soon as possible, but because of the lack of financial allocations, it was necessary to search for international partners, most notably UN-Habitat. The decision was to maintain cooperation and invest their expertise in this field, and we succeeded in this endeavour and today we have reaped the fruits of this success by opening these projects"

"Today we have attended a great ceremony conducted by UN-Habitat for the handover of Al-Nejoom Park in west Al-Bakr Neighbourhood and the project to support COVID-19 mitigation in east Al-Bakr. Al-Bakr neighbourhood was greatly affected by conflict and these projects made a magnificent imprint on the community. I would like to thank and appreciate the work of the heroes who put all their efforts towards implementing these two projects to return life to this neighbourhood," said Mr. Muhannad Zbar Al-Obaidi, Mayor of Heet.

Background:

The town of Heet (over 70,000 inhabitants) is located along the Euphrates River, northwest of Ramadi, the provincial capital. The city fell to ISIL in October 2014 and was recaptured after a military offensive by the Iraqi Security Forces in April 2016. It suffered significant physical damage to homes and public facilities, and its inhabitants endured great hardships. UN-Habitat established a presence in Heet in 2019 to support sustainable returns and more recently, mitigation of COVID-19 in poor neighbourhoods. With the support of implementing partners, the living conditions of recent returnees in Al Bakr neighbourhood have been improved, allowing many who were still in camps, or living with relatives or renting, to return to their homes, and to dignified, adequate and appropriate living conditions.

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