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Kirkuk Courthouses Ease Judicial Procedures

By LuAnne Fantasia
 Gulf Region North



The Dibis and Daquq Courthouse projects were turned over to the Government of Iraq over the last two months. The courthouses are two of 21 completed security and justice reconstruction projects for the Kirkuk Province in the nationwide Iraq Reconstruction Program. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Gulf Region North district has construction management responsibility for more than 1,400 reconstruction projects for its seven provinces. [USACE Photo]

KIRKUK PROVINCE, Iraq — Two courthouse projects were completed and turned over to the Government of Iraq over the last two months helping to create a viable judicial system possible in northern Iraq.

The U.S. Army Corp of Engineers Gulf Region North district completed the Dibis and Daquq courthouses—two of 21 completed security and justice projects for the Kirkuk Province in the nationwide Iraq Reconstruction Program.

“The Daquq courthouse was a good project for us to manage,” said Lt. Col. Bob Ruud, Deputy Area Engineer, Kirkuk Area Office, GRN. “It was the second courthouse in a series of four...we learned

some things on the Dibis courthouse that we incorporated into Daquq.”

Navy Lt. Cdr. Tim Keeton, Deputy, Rule of Law section, Kirkuk Provincial Reconstruction Team said both courthouses were sorely needed. “The previous Dibis courthouse was the second floor of a women’s center in Dibis. They didn’t even own their own real estate. Their situation made proper screening and control of defendants impossible.”

Marlon Cobar is the Kirkuk PRT’s resident legal advisor and an Assistant U.S. Attorney. Together, he and Keeton help Kirkuk’s provincial government build the



Army Lt. Col. Bob Rudd, Kirkuk Area Office Deputy Area Engineer, visits the Dibis courthouse. The community began using its new courthouse immediately upon completion last month vacating its previous location — the second floor of a women’s center. The new courthouse has a spacious courtroom, rooms for the guards and judges, and separate areas for searching men and women before entering the building. [USACE Photo]

legal stability necessary to transition to full control of its province.

Cobar said, "The rule of law infrastructure program is a key part of standing up the rule of law in this province, and in restoring public confidence in the provincial legal system." He added that the Corps of Engineers developed the program in partnership with civilian officials in Kirkuk and U.S. military.

According to Keeton, security in the Kirkuk Province has improved with the new courthouses. "Both cities now have a courthouse with detention areas, spacious courtrooms, rooms for the guards and the judges, and separate areas for searching men and women before they can enter the building," he said. Both facilities are within enclosed compounds.

Although the Dibis and Daquq courthouses are well-used, Keeton explained that insurgent cases are still tried in Baghdad.

"The provincial courthouses handle less complex criminal cases, as well as family law, land claims, business contractual type cases, and notarizations—those kinds of legal procedures," Keeton said.

PRTs are small combined civilian-military units created to support and empower Iraq's new and local provincial governments. They're composed of U.S. and Coalition diplomats, military officers, development experts, and other engineering, agribusiness, and rule of law specialists.

"The rule of law section of the PRT encompasses criminal justice, the Iraqi police, its court system and to some extent, the Iraqi Army," Keeton added.

The courthouse projects cost about \$300,000 each and were funded by the Commander's Emergency Response Program, whereby brigade combat team commanders work with their local Iraqi communities to address immediate needs.

Over \$375 million of the nationwide \$18 billion Iraq Relief and Reconstruction Fund has been obligated in the Kirkuk Province. To date, more than 140 reconstruction projects have been completed



A Dibis judge prepares for the day in his new chamber within the recently completed Dibis courthouse. [USACE Photo]

with 18 ongoing projects and 10 projects still in developmental stages.

Ruud said there are two more courthouses planned for the Kirkuk Province. "Altum Copri will be the next courthouse to finish, and even though they all share the same basic design, it will be even better, due to our experience with the first two," Ruud said. The fourth courthouse is planned for Tuz but that project will not be managed by GRN, according to Ruud.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Gulf Region North district has project management and construction management responsibilities for military and civilian construction projects in the northern seven provinces in Iraq. The district also assists the Iraqi Government in assuming full responsibility for national reconstruction.

Since Iraq's sovereignty in 2004 and to date, the Gulf Region North District has completed 1,212 of 1,469 planned projects to improve the failing infrastructure in northern Iraq; helping build the Iraqi peoples' confidence in their young government. At a price tag of \$2.5 billion to date, reconstruction projects in northern Iraq include schools, health clinics and hospitals; water and sewage treatment plants and networks; electrical; oil; roads and bridges, and Iraqi security and military facilities.

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