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## ***Dhi Qar Province Officials, GRS Leaders Discuss Reconstruction Issues***

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**TALLIL**, Iraq – Senior officials of Dhi Qar Province and leaders of the Gulf Region South district of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers held a detailed discussion of procedures, projects and challenges related to rebuilding the province, and agreed at the end of the session that it improved communications and helped smooth out bumps along the road toward reconstruction.

Reflecting the sense of partnership evidenced during the talks held Oct. 24, Col. Steve Hill, commander of GRS, said he was honored to be with such distinguished officials and extended an open-door invitation for the Iraqi officials to visit GRS headquarters any time to discuss reconstruction matters.

"This is your office," the colonel told the Deputy Governor and a half a dozen Directors General (DGs) of key Dhi Qar Provincial Ministries such as health, education, water, and electricity.

"This is good stuff," said Cmdr. Mike Lang of the person-to-person exchanges that occurred at the meeting.

"A lot of it is understanding each other," added Lang, who hosted the meeting in his capacity as officer in charge of GRS' Adder Area Office. The session took place initially with the entire group and then devolved to a handful of smaller working groups, with translators assisting in all forums.

The participants heard about vari-

ous projects nearing completion in Dhi Qar Province as well as work planned there in the period ahead. Among the projects described by GRS personnel as nearly complete were three primary healthcare centers, the renovation of the Nasiriyah Maternity Hospital, three electrical substations, and one bridge.

John Overfield, the GRS engineer for the Nasiriyah Maternity Hospital project, said he was told during a breakout session that the Iraqis want to take occupancy of the hospital as soon as possible. He said some work remains to be done but that he expects the hospital to be turned over to Iraqi control next month.

Among the upcoming initiatives discussed were 20 school projects. The original idea was for 20 new schools to be constructed in lieu of so-called mud schools, explained Art Patterson, GRS' PRT Engineer who works with the Provincial Reconstruction Teams for Dhi Qar and Muthanna Provinces. This subsequently gave way to the idea of a mix of building new schools and rehabilitating existing schools. By the end of the meeting, Iraqi and American officials were agreed on a plan to build 20 new schools in Dhi Qar Province. Dhi Qar is one of the nine provinces in southern Iraq where GRS is undertaking reconstruction activities.

The meeting also provided a forum for Iraqi officials to ask about possible modifications to projects already ap-

proved, as was the case with a question about the possibility of extending the distribution line from a compact water unit to enable the unit to serve an additional village. GRS officials said they would look into the matter.

Among the issues brought to light at the meeting are that electrical hookups are needed for the emerging new health-care centers to function as intended and that warranties on medical equipment purchased for the centers several years ago are about to expire.

Patterson, the PRT Engineer, explained the procedure whereby project ideas originate with the DGs and wind their way through to GRS. He said it is a drawn out process but that it works and it is fair.

Lang told the Iraqis that while the DGs are GRS' key customers along with the Iraqi people, GRS has to be the party that directs the contractors, not the DGs. "We can't have the DGs tell contractors to adjust the work," he said.

Col. Hill elaborated by saying that "we work for you" but "we must follow the contract." Patterson said understanding

what a given job is all about would be enhanced if the DG or their representatives attended pre-construction meeting between GRS officials and the contractor.

Also at the meeting, the Iraqis were told that all new road paving work done through the Corps of Engineers will require a "sustainment letter" certifying that the government of Iraq will help get bitumen at government prices for the projects. They also were told water projects will require letters from provincial officials to the Ministry of Water in Baghdad certifying compliance with environmental standards governing discharge of sludge from water compact units.

"We have some challenges," Col. Hill told the group. "It is our responsibility to provide services to the people," he went on, saying "responsibility is the word of the day" and asking rhetorically, "If we do not provide services to the people, who will?"

"This partnership is definitely a very positive step to meeting our responsibility," stated Col. Hill.

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