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Courthouse and witness protection facility source of pride, showpiece for Basrah provincial government

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BASRAH, Iraq--A courthouse and witness protection facility project is providing hundreds of jobs as well as technical and management training for many people in this southern Iraq city.

At last count the project was employing on average 350 local workers a day and has helped the local economy to grow, according to Leo Sandoval, resident engineer with the Basrah Area Office of the Gulf Region South district of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

In addition, Sandoval said, USACE has trained construction and management staff on construction processes from in-the-trenches field construction to management responsibilities for handling multi-million dollar contracts. This has enabled a number of Basrah workers to become leaders for others to follow in the process of rebuilding Iraq.

The project involves the construction of a two-story courthouse and witness protection annex in Basrah, the second largest city in Iraq. "When completed, the installation will provide the Iraqi people with a complete courthouse and witness protection facility to assist in the justice process," Sandoval said.

The courthouse is about 85 percent complete and the witness protection annex is approximately 90 percent complete, according to the GRS Iraqi deputy resident engineer with the Basrah Area Office.



The main building of the Basrah Regional Courthouse, critical to enforcement of the rule of law, is currently 85 percent complete. (USACE photo)



Iraqi local workers install white stone to the exterior of the witness protection facility. (USACE photo)



An Iraqi worker works on plumbing bathrooms of the 1st floor of the Basrah courthouse building. Construction is providing hundreds of Iraqis with good paying jobs bringing economic growth to the local economy. (USACE photo)

The contract is split into two contract line items, Sandoval explained. He said the first is the Main Courthouse Facility built at a cost of \$8.8 million and the second is the annex built at a cost of \$2 million for a \$10.8 million total cost for the complex. In addition, GRS has renovated three other courthouses in Basrah Province and is in the process of building another courthouse costing about \$1.4 million in the Shat Al-Arab area, he said.

The total cost of all these justice-related projects is just under \$15 million, according to Tom Eidson, head of engineering and construction for GRS. Eidson said the new courthouse and witness protection facility in Basrah will be a source of pride and a showpiece for the entire provincial government. The Basrah Province is one of the nine southern Iraq provinces in which GRS is conducting reconstruction projects.

Eidson said an effective legal system is essential to a stable social structure and a foundation of a high standard of living.

"The rule of law is something I strongly believe in and feel is crucial to the success of Iraq," Sandoval said. The witness protection annex, he said, "...will provide protection to the people of Iraq who wish to come forward in the name of justice." He said Iraq's children deserve the hope of a life of freedom from fear.

Sandoval added, "The Iraqi Minister of Justice has followed this project very closely and in fact has visited the site personally and by representation on numerous occasions to ensure that the project is proceeding without impacts. They have expressed that they are very satisfied with the construction they have seen and know that this is critical in their country's pursuit of peace and justice."



Iraqi workers place concrete bases for walkways in front of the Basrah courthouse building project. (USACE photo)

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