



February 7, 2008

Commander's Emergency Response Program example for Iraqi city councils, officials

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The Commander's Emergency Response Program has had immediate, positive impact throughout Iraq. A compliment to the much larger multi-billion dollar infrastructure projects that are in the purview of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, CERP projects, undertaken by field unit commanders via local contracts or through USACE, provide much needed improvements for communities. When field commanders learn from local officials that a certain area is in urgent need of facilities, such as water compact units, sewage pumps, health centers or school renovations, they can immediately embark on executing the required projects since they have the authority and the money. All these projects are executed within the limited budget allocated to the CERP.

While individual projects under CERP may not always be large, the program is generous. For example, since 2004, CERP has budgeted \$750 million for projects in Baghdad. For the once restive Anbar province, \$287 million has been budgeted. Still one of the most heated areas in Iraq, Diyala province has \$105 million budgeted.

Talking about the projects executed through CERP throughout Iraq would take more space than I have for my commentary. Let me focus on this essential point: it is critical and imperative for the officials at city councils to look carefully at the example of the CERP. The urgency with which field commanders respond when they hear from local officials about a need is exemplary.

Too often the officials who have been elected to city councils do nothing but make promises.

If there is not enough money allocated by the central government to their areas, all they have to do is inform the field commanders of the need of the people of the districts they represent. However, even this little effort some officials have not made.

Recently, Al Hurra correspondents Maytham A Shibani and Haidar Al Badri have reported on three areas in three different provinces that suffering from the absence of essential facilities after four years of the emergence of democracy in Iraq.

Five kilometers from the Baghdad Amanat boundaries lies a district called Al Hameediya with a population of 500,000. These people still suffer from a shortage of drinking water. There is no health center. It has only one school with a muddy playground.

In Babil province, the village called Al Hmisaniyah suffers from the absence of electricity, no sewage system, no source of drinking water, except that drawn from a slow flowing river. The people of the village and the cattle, dogs, goats and sheep share this dreary river. School children have to walk for about 12 kilometers to reach a school in an adjacent district.

In a village in A Shamiya district, about 30 kilometers away from Al Diwanya, people suffered much from the neglect of tyrant regime. They were so happy when they heard of its collapse. They thought the government of the new democratic Iraq would compensate them for the facilities they missed during the old era. They covered a long distance to go the polling stations to vote for the candidates who promised them they would bring facilities to them.

Unfortunately, the dreams of the poor people did not come true. Their candidates did not keep their promises once they won election.

In that village, the patience of the 170 or so boys and the girls never gives out. They have not lost hope in good people who, once they hear about their suffering, will do everything they can for them in providing potable water, electrical, access to health care and a new school.

For the children, a new school is desperately needed for the existing one consists of seven class rooms; five built of mud and the others are tents. When it rains, the water flows inside. The students shiver from the cold.

Despite all this deprivation, you find the students keep attending classes every morning. They insist on defeating all the circumstances that might thwart their efforts to pursue their study to be doctors, teachers or engineers. Bettering themselves to rebuild their country and obliterate all the wicked efforts that attempt to derail the reconstruction mission in Iraq. They want to be a part of building Iraq to become a prosperous country and a good example for the people of the other countries deprived of democracy.

CERP exists to meet these urgent needs, but the ones who can contact a field commander are the officials at the city councils in Babil and other provinces, the representative of the people elected them.

The city council members and other senior officials in the government need to know that what Iraqis want is serving democracy, not a ruling democracy.

They want to enjoy basic services that they were deprived of under the fallen regime. They need to taste change happening in their lives; they need to see action from the democracy that many people risked and sacrifice themselves to achieve.

Iraqis need to pick the fruits of democracy which are freedom, prosperity and fairness.