WHO/Basrah
Mission to Environmental Health Department in Bab –Al Zubair, And Central Blood Bank in Basrah on 6 July 2003

A. Environmental Health Department-Basra,

WHO was invited by Dr Hassan Abdul Hussein - the manager of the department to inform on several environmental conditions that possibly affect the health situation in Basra. In the centre, the mission was briefed by Mr. Khajak Vruer Vartan, the physicist in charge of the radiation protection unit, as follows:

1. Since 1991, the area of Basra Governorate is full of remnants of destroyed tanks and military equipment which are all around the area. The department has been measuring the radioactivity both in the battle fields and in Basra city. It was noticed that the radioactivity in the directly affected vehicles and objects were around 7 milli-rad/hour, while in Basra city, it was recorded 0.008. It has been noticed that over the years, the radioactivity in the city is on the increase because the dust is being carried by winds and storms from the battle fields to Basra city.

   In 2002, this radioactivity was as high as 0.014 mR/hour. However, vegetables and other food items are not polluted if they are properly washed.

2. The department has been responsible for raising public awareness of various radiation issues and labelling dangerous sites. This work has stopped since the beginning of the recent crisis.

3. During the chaos following the war, several institutes which used radioactive materials were looted. The institutes are as follows:
   a) The Fertilizers industry: where Caesium 137 was stolen
   b) Iridium 129 and Caesium (Cs)137 and Neutron Source were stolen from the Petrochemical factory and the Southern Petrol Company
   c) Caesium (Cs,) Thorium and Beryllium were stolen from the Oil Logging company
   d) The Neutron source was stolen from Basra University (Faculty of Science). This had been re-bought by the expert for 50 cents from the vegetable market in Basra

4. One of the functions of the department is to examine imported food items, also for radioactive pollution. This function stopped after the war.

5. The Department needs to assess the new situation and re-establish surveillance for radioactive objects.

The Needs of the Department are:
Security, permission to examine new battle sites, equipments and protective clothing. A request to this effect is in preparation.

B. Central Public health Laboratory and the Department of Preventive Medicine and PHC were fully destroyed and vandalized.

C. Blood Bank
The Blood Bank in Basra is not looted. It is functioning with full capacity performing the following: blood separation, blood testing for hepatitis B and C, and HIV. It also provides 15 hospitals in Basra and surroundings with blood (2500 pint/month). Elisa kits provided by the CPHL (before the crisis) were destroyed. Most of the equipment are donated by the Austro-Arab Association.

Problems and Needs:
- There is need for some physical rehabilitation
- Some equipment such as blood bag shaker and balance, sealer, new blood donation chairs and new refrigerators are urgently needed.