A press briefing was held at ORHA Office today during which the current problems facing the health care system were explained by WHO Officer in Charge. WHO stressed that unless rapid measures are taken to address the issues of salaries of the staff and to improve the situation of power and water supply and garbage collection and disposal as well as security, there will be health crises to expect. It was also explained that reactivation of the national drug distribution should be given priority.

WHO met with a Time Magazine journalist (Mr. Nir Rosen) (nirrosen@hotmail.com) + 882162012128, accompanied by Mr. Meitham Jasin (Iraqi translator). The journalist was interested in getting a better understanding of the health situation in the country and the urgent needs of the sector.

Mr. Rosen was briefed on the health situation before the conflict and the current situation and the main challenges to revitalize the sector. The main points developed were taken from Dr. Nabarro’s presentation at the 22 May 2003 open session of the UN security Council “Safeguarding the health of Iraq’s people: the urgent need to restart (or jump-start the health system.

Mr. Rosen has agreed to share with WHO the draft article he is preparing on Iraq before it is finalized for publication. He also requested if he could join a WHO team visiting a hospital. WHO has promised to look into the matter and will inform him on the possibility, if any.

WHO met with two representatives of COOPI – Cooperazione Internazionale which is an Italian development and relief organisation (NGO). It exists since 1965 to assist the most vulnerable individuals in developing countries. Regarding its activities in Iraq, COOPI representatives stated that their organization started its activities in Iraq since 17 April 2003.

COOPI plans to provide support to emergency preparation and response to epidemic outbreak, healthcare system (EPI, MCH and nutrition), reconstruction of health facilities, water & sanitation, advocacy, vocational training and psycho-social rehabilitation in Baghdad, and some of central Governorates.

COOPI has completed on 20 May 2003 an assessment of 108 Primary Health Care Centres (PHCCs) 56 in Rasafa and 52 in Kharkh. This assessment was done, according to COOPI representatives, in close cooperation with MoH Preventive Department and Health Directorate Office through meetings and contacts.

COOPI is offering to support seven PHCCs and one Sub-center which were found to be within two lowest assessment score grades (with highest needs). These include “Al-Eskan”,...
“Al-Bakreeya” inside the city area, and “Al-Tajey No. 1 & 2 (20-25 km from the town center), “Sub-Albor” (35 km from the town center), “Al-Abayachey” (60 km from the town center) and “Al-Tabe” (80 km from the town center) with its sub-center “Sheikh Hamed” (70 km from the town center). Those centres have been selected because of the mortality recorded, urgent increased health needs, building reconstruction needs, insufficient water system and food availability. Most of the senior health staff (MDs, Dentists, Lab, Pharmacy, etc.) is female and majority of the patients are women and children. Currently, talks are on going with Al-Karkh Health Directorate Office how to proceed with this program. COOPI also hired civil engineer to assess construction problems and needs in each of those facilities. Following integrated program orientation, COOPI is planning to introduce water and sanitation project (including health and hygiene promotion activities) in the same catchment areas. In coordination with UNICEF, COOPI will also try to re-establish CCCUs and monitor nutrition status of targeted population. However, much will depend on available resources and donor support and funding.

COOPI has developed a proposal “Implementation of Emergency Health Response Program in Al-Karkh, Directorate of Baghdad City, Baghdad” to be submitted to ECHO for funding. The budget proposal amounts at € 395,194 and would be implemented with 6-9 months period. The plan is to start the project with the month of July 2003.

Today Friday 23 May, four trucks left Baghdad to deliver 10 and 8 Norwegian surgical kits to Basrah and Hilla governorates respectively.