



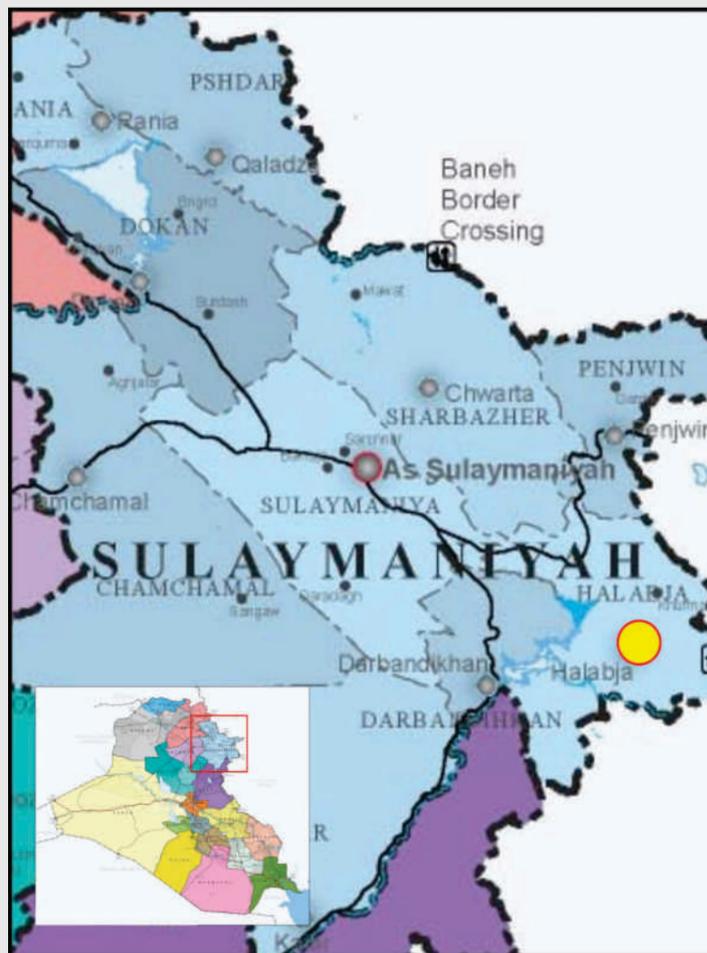
# Restoring Halabja from ashes

*Halabja, Iraq - April, 2010* - Halabja, a Kurdish town in northern Iraq (Sulaymaniyah Governorate), located about 240 km northeast of Baghdad and only 15 km from Iranian border. On 16 March 1988 this settlement was subjected to shelling with chemical weapons leaving 5,000 dead and 7,000 injured with long-term illnesses. The chemical after-effects of the attack are still affecting people. Since the chemical attacks, the number of various forms of cancer, birth deformities, still-born babies and miscarriages is reported to have dramatically increased and traces of the chemical agents are still residing in the water, air and food.

Lack of proper maternal and child care health service is one of the most crucial health problems. Most of the patients who require advanced treatment are obliged to travel either to Sulaymaniyah, Erbil or Baghdad, which comprises an unbearable burden for the vulnerable population groups.

In 2007, the Government of Japan requested United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to construct and equip a specialized maternal and child care hospital with all staff housing and training facilities. UNDP immediately embarked on this venture and contacted the Department of Health of Sulaymaniyah governorate to identify a location for the construction of this important health centre.

The construction works started immediately upon completion of formal legal procedures, expecting completion of the entire



UNDP Team discussing future steps for finalization of Halabja Maternal and Child Health Care Hospital with Mr. Alen Abdulrahman, Director of the Hospital and Mr. Masatoshi Kakumen Country Representative for Peace Winds Japan

project by the end of September 2010. This significant project entails construction of the 50-bed maternal and child care hospital in Halabja with two staff houses to accommodate 8 families of the Hospital medical staff. In addition it will provide medical equipment to start its operation, including training for medical staff assigned to the newly constructed hospital in Halabja.

In April 2010, UNDP undertook a monitoring visit to verify the progress and status of construction works, including installation of window frames for entrance yard, courtyard, ward room, setting up the elevator system, false ceiling, electrical installations and façade cladding with stone tiles.

During the visit to Halabja, the newly appointed Director of Halabja maternal and child care hospital Mr. Alen Abdulrahman who is monitoring the works of the contractor on behalf of the Department of Health briefed UNDP team on the project progress and steps forward.

“This hospital is of a prime importance for the entire Sharazor region, home to some 350,000 inhabitants. There is no specialized maternity and pediatric hospital in this region, but only departments within general hospitals. Whenever specialized or advanced treatment is required, depending on their need, patients visit either maternity hospital or pediatric hospital in Sulaymaniyah. This 50-bed hospital in Halabja with its trained staff will cover the needs of the population living in the region of Sharazor for the following 15 years” said Mr. Abdulrahman.

He further added that “Years ago a British scientist on genetics studied the long-term effects of the 1988 chemical attack and had discovered that there are mutation cases amongst patients coming from this region affected with varieties of long term diseases; particularly with effect on infertility on women patients and congenital malformations on pediatric patients. Due to lack of a specialized institute there are no proper records maintained on exact numbers and types of birth defects and fatal death cases. Halabja maternal and child care hospital will help in initiating the research and proper recording and tracking system of these cases” concluding that “UNDP and the Government of Japan are restoring Halabja from ashes”.

UNDP’s implementing partner for this project is Peace Winds Japan, an NGO based in Sulaymaniyah, ensuring the proper attainment of scope of the works. Mr. Masatoshi Kakumen, Country Representative for Peace Winds Japan stated that “a training assessment mission was conducted from Ireland to review the nursing system in the region, end they are now preparing a training program for maternal and child care hospital staff, which is expected to begin in July of this year. In the meantime, the construction works will be completed and equipment installed and operational which will allow uninterrupted on the job training.”

The Ministry of Health of Kurdistan Regional Government has initiated construction of two other hospitals in the same location, turning this once abandoned field into a massive construction site that will soon become a large health centre providing access to health care for the population of Sharazor region. And there is no doubt that inhabitants of this remote area are in need of proper and dedicated health care. A care they once lacked.



With construction almost complete, and equipment installed, hospital staff will be trained to attain to the needs of most vulnerable population of the region, home to 350,000 inhabitants