



**Testimony before the House Subcommittee on National Security, Emerging Threats,
and International Relations, Committee on Government Reform:**

**Submitted by
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Mr. Chairman, thank you again for providing Save the Children the opportunity to testify before your committee. I especially want to thank Save the Children's hometown Representative, Congressman Chris Shays, for his leadership and support of Save the Children's work in Connecticut and around the United States and in more than 40 countries around the world.

Of the questions submitted to witnesses we will address the coalition's efforts in distributing aid and development funds, rebuilding infrastructure and the creation of a stable economy generating jobs for Iraqis. We will draw upon our experience in the delivery of humanitarian assistance in Iraq. From that experience we will discuss the challenges that we are encountering in providing humanitarian assistance in Iraq and finally the solutions that we recommend for overcoming these challenges in Iraq and in future conflict situations.

Firstly, I would like to inform the Committee of the work currently being undertaken by Save the Children in Iraq. We are located in the southern province of Iraq in Basra and have two sub-offices in Samawah and Nasiriyah. Our offices employ 151 aid workers of which 90% are Iraqis. Save the Children is working with and mobilizing communities to help strengthen their capacity and promote child protection. In addition, Save the Children is enabling thousands of Iraqi children and their families to reclaim their lives by providing education, food, water, cooking fuel, shelter, medicines, and other basic necessities. Staff security remains a major concern for us in the planning and running of our programs as serious security situations can occur with little or no warning, and staff members remain on high alert.

Save the Children is also working with Iraqi citizens in over 100 communities to launch development projects aimed at rebuilding war-torn neighborhoods in southern Iraq. Our sister agency, Save the Children UK, is continuing its programs in northern Iraq where it has been working since 1991.

Our programs dealing with education and protection will assist 50 urban and rural schools by rehabilitating school buildings and restocking classrooms with recreation, teaching and music kits, developing teacher-training curricula for landmine awareness, health and safety lessons and setting up parent-teacher associations. Through the development of four story books and several posters we are educating children about landmines in the schools. Another important initiative is the sponsoring of 14 summer camps for more than 8,500 children in southern Iraq to help educate children about the dangers of landmines and unexploded ordinances while also helping to inject a sense of normalcy into the lives of children. Finally, through the training of teachers from over 85 schools we are tooling teachers with the ability to ensure health and safety, landmine and UXO awareness and the psychosocial support for children and their parents.

Through our community development programs our staff have assisted Iraqi citizens in 100 communities launch more than 445 development projects to rebuild war-torn neighborhoods. To date, over 241 projects have been completed, with the remaining

projects in various stages of completion. Top priorities include providing clean water and sanitation to local neighborhoods and rehabilitating looted schools and clinics.

Lessons learned from the distribution of aid and development funds

We had the privilege of speaking to this Committee one year ago and we reiterate many of the issues that we raised that day.

One of vital lessons we have learned over 85 years of providing humanitarian assistance is the necessity of building good relationships with the community. In our programs in the US and in the 40 countries in which we work, this is a hallmark of our programs – involving the community in identifying their own needs and in working with them to solve their problems. Although building relationships, which translates into building ownership, takes some time, it engenders the trust and credibility needed to move forward with the support of the community to accomplish our joint humanitarian goals and improve security.

To ensure good relations with the local community it is important to hire local staff to lead, coordinate and represent the organization on the ground. The backbone of our programs around the world are our local and national staff that have the cultural skills and knowledge to move forward our programs in communities where US nationals could never work. We have learned that together we can share our varied expertise that result in cutting edge development and humanitarian assistance programming. I have heard over and over from my colleagues that the strength of our programming in Iraq is our Iraqi staff. We have worked side by side with them and they “own” programs there. In addition, gaining acceptance locally for our mission and activities through the efforts of all our staff, but particularly our Iraqi staff, is the foundation to our approach to security.

An area of concern for NGOs in delivering humanitarian assistance in Iraq was the interaction between humanitarian organizations and US military actors on the ground. While interaction between civil and military actors on the ground is both a reality and a necessity, particularly in sharing information about security, the impartiality and neutrality of humanitarian workers and organizations must be maintained. NGOs working in Iraq have been uncomfortable with the influence that the US military has tried to exercise over relief operations through organizations as the Humanitarian Operations Center (HOC) in Kuwait and ORHA (Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance).

Save the Children and other agencies that are/were providing humanitarian assistance in Iraq drafted a series of principles clarifying what would constitute an unacceptable degree of military control over assistance. We need to be constantly aware of these issues and are monitoring the situation in the field closely to make sure our impartiality and neutrality is maintained.

The Department of Defense must understand that there are very delicate cultural and political issues at play throughout Iraq. For example, in a meeting with Shiite clerics in Kerbala, a colleague noted that he heard tremendous anger and concern about US tanks rolling up next to some of the holiest Shiite shrines, and fears this could spontaneously erupt in a bloodbath. We need an experienced leadership that knows how to deal with these cultural and political issues. Rebuilding societies at the individual and communal level requires personal training and experience, just as winning a war does. Unfortunately, not enough people trained in the business of rebuilding societies and communities were enabled to do so.

In the planning and development of responses to the conflict despite repeated requests, the Administration delayed sharing even unclassified details of its humanitarian emergency contingency plans with the NGO community. Without access to such plans, it is virtually impossible for relief agencies to plan properly. We as a community were also stymied for months in our efforts to obtain the required paperwork to conduct assessment missions in Iraq and its neighboring nations. It was not until six months after InterAction first raised the issue – that the Bush Administration streamlined the process for obtaining necessary licenses from the Treasury Department. This was then a welcome and long-overdue development.

Further, funding and forward planning on the issue of protection and the psychosocial needs of a population need to be given a priority whether they be in Iraq or any other country in crisis. The success of any reconstruction effort is that the society itself feels that they too have been assisting in rebuilding their own lives. Many of the people I spoke to said that, “I too need to be rebuilt and reconstructed, where is the help and assistance for us?”

Finally, large-scale contractor plans must include the input, consultation, and ownership of the Iraqi people. Without the partnership of the Iraqis, schools, orphanages, hospitals, and government works will continue to be targeted for looting and destruction. People only really comprehend reconstruction when they themselves are given ownership in the process and pride in the accomplishment.

Lesson learned in rebuilding infrastructure

We have learned that reconstruction requires patience – that rebuilding societies, cities, towns, mosques – doesn’t happen overnight. It is vital that communities are given realistic expectations in relation to reconstruction so that disappointment arising from expected delays does not hamper their faith in recovery. In an age where we all are driven to deliver progress in a matter of hours or days, our practical experience demonstrates that the successes after World War II and the Korean war were measurable after many years if not decades.

Not only does building local commitment require patience, we have also learned the lesson that reconstruction must focus not only on material outputs – how many schools

are built, pantries stocked, hospitals supplied – but also on the social infrastructure. Do the women and children feel *safe* enough to go to school or to visit the hospital? Do communities feel enough ownership of physical infrastructure to protect it and maintain it?

Barriers to providing humanitarian assistance in Iraq

The main barrier for anyone working in Iraq continues to be security. Although in some ways life in Iraq is returning to normal – stores are open, people are leaving their homes, children are slowly returning to school – more needs to be done. When we were able to operate in Baghdad parents told us that they would not be letting children attend school because roving criminal gangs were kidnapping children from the neighborhoods.

We are often slow in recognizing a “crisis in protection” whether that be in Uganda, Sudan or indeed in Iraq. Without security and without interventions aimed at ensuring the protection of vulnerable groups in societies any intended benefit can be eroded and mitigated by the lack of protection.

We had reports from our staff in the field that friendly US soldiers were allowing children to ride around on tanks. This is not and was not acceptable from a protection stand point – just consider what would happen if one of these children fell beneath the wheels (and we understand that this did happen with the food trucks). This does not send the right message to our children. In neither the initial Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance program support instruments to NGOs, nor USAID’s more recent request for application for community rehabilitation has women and child protection been listed as a prioritized project activity. The US government and NGOs must prioritize the protection needs of women and children in the onset of our humanitarian response

As we have all seen US military, UN and Iraqi officials being targeted for violence by those committed to resisting occupation authority. NGOs are at a growing risk of becoming targets themselves. While I totally agree that the US government should be recognized for their generosity in providing humanitarian assistance, this recognition should not endanger the lives of humanitarian workers and should be handled differently in different situations. There must be a balance between the safety and security of our staff and the need for providing recognition of the funding source.

An important element in ensuring protection and security is a functioning police force. We feel that the US military should have responded sooner in establishing a functioning police force that could have restored order. Until basic order is restored, life-saving humanitarian assistance cannot be delivered with the speed and quantity that is now needed. Many of our European allies have experienced police trainers who are skilled at providing policing and at training the local force at the same time. Kosovo provides a good example of this sort of key policing support.

Recommendations/ Lesson learned

Distribution of aid and development funds

- The USG must ensure that Iraqi people are central to the planning and implementation of projects in Iraq to enable building good relationships with the community. Central to achieving that aim is the importance of hiring local staff to lead, coordinate and represent the organization/ efforts on the ground.
- The US government and NGOs must prioritize the protection needs of women and children in the onset of our humanitarian response.

Rebuilding infrastructure

- The USG should facilitate an expanded role for the United Nations and other international partners for post conflict reconstruction -- the rebuilding of societies should involve those organizations and bodies with the most experience to do so. Further, that reconstruction must focus not only on material outputs but also on the social infrastructure.

Security

- The USG should ensure that Iraq has adequate security by prioritizing the establishment of a functioning police force that can restore order.