



**Testimony before the House Subcommittee on National Security, Emerging Threats,
and International Relations, Committee on Government Reform:
"Humanitarian Assistance Following Military Operations:
Overcoming Barriers—Part II"**

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Mr. Chairman, thank you for providing Save the Children the opportunity to testify before your committee and for your leadership in bringing us together to discuss the challenges that confront the NGO community and the US government in providing humanitarian assistance in Iraq. I am pleased to represent Save the Children before this committee.

The history of Save the Children reflects our deep commitment to working with children in war torn settings. Founded by Eglantyne Jebb, the author of the Declaration on the Rights of the Child, in London in 1919, Save the Children's original focus was on providing food for starving children in Europe in the wake of World War I. In 1938 Save the Children provided food, blankets and medicine to children displaced by war in England, France, Germany, Italy, Austria and Finland. Post World War II support for children was expanded to Holland, Greece and West Germany. The organization entered Korea in 1951 to assist civilians caught in the conflict of war. According to Eglantyne Jebb, "all wars are waged against children."

Today Save the Children US works in 18 states across the United States as well as in more than 40 countries in the developing world to help children and families improve their health, education and economic opportunities. We continue to mobilize rapid life-support assistance for children and families caught in conflicts and other humanitarian emergencies – such as in Afghanistan, Nepal, Guinea, West Bank and Gaza, Indonesia, and now Iraq.

My written statement will focus on three points regarding the role of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in post-conflict settings: 1) The lessons we have learned from providing humanitarian assistance in previous crisis and how we have applied these to our operations in Iraq; 2) The challenges that we are encountering in providing humanitarian assistance in Iraq; and finally, 3) The solutions that we recommend for overcoming these challenges in Iraq and in future conflict situations.

First, I'd like to give you some information on what it is Save the Children is doing in Iraq. We currently have 18 international and over 80 national staff working in Iraq, with another 5 national staff working in Kuwait. Our current funding includes \$4 million from the US Agency for International Development Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance, \$80,000 in private resources, \$80,000 from Save the Children Norway, and \$50,000 from DFID – the British equivalent of USAID, \$30,000 from the International Office of Migration (IOM), and most recently \$60,000 from UNICEF.

In Baghdad, we are working to provide information for mine and unexploded ordnance (UXO) clearance from school facilities and recreational areas around schools. We are also providing school and recreational supplies in the peri-urban Dora and Shula sections of the city. In order to ensure that secondary school girls can get to school safely, we are providing transport and working with communities on ways to ensure security for all

students on the way to school. Examples of this are community watches and escorts by parents.

In Basrah we have provided 100 preschool kits that include art supplies, recreational equipment, school supplies, games, story and songbooks, blackboard paint, and other supplies. We are also working in mine awareness and hygiene education in the schools in Basra governate.

Save the Children has an agreement with UNICEF to assist the Ministry of Health (MOH) in reestablishing the Targeted Nutrition Program in Basrah Governornate.

Our organization is the implementing partner with the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) in Al Basrah, Najaf and Karbala governorates, where the first monthly food distribution to vulnerable group institutions (orphanages, elderly homes and mental institutions) and internally displaced peoples or IDPs have been completed. Additionally, Save the Children has been coordinating minor structural repairs to the orphanages, elderly homes and schools in Al Basrah and Karbala.

The recent grant from UNICEF it to provide funding for a short-term rapid assessment of the immediate protection needs of vulnerable children. Save the Children has also replaced pumps, ball bearings and filters for the main source of water for the Basrah governorate, ensuring safe drinking water for children and their families. Finally, in cooperation with the World Health Organization, Save the Children is providing essential medications, medical supplies, and health and safety training for children in hospitals and clinics in Basrah and Karbala.

Lessons Leaned from Providing Humanitarian Assistance

One of the key lessons that Save the Children has learned in our 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.

Which leads me to my next point – the importance of **hiring 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” our 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.

We learned that **reconstruction requires patience** – that rebuilding societies, cities, towns, mosques – doesn't happen overnight. In an age where we are all driven to deliver progress in a matter of hours or days, our practical experience demonstrates that the major successes after World War II and the Korean War were achieved 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 the school or to visit the hospital? Do communities feel enough ownership of physical infrastructure to protect it and maintain it?

Finally, leading up to the war in Iraq, Save the Children was a part of Joint NGO Emergency Preparedness Initiative for Iraq Consortium, known as JNEPI. Other members of the Consortium included the International Rescue Committee, International Medical Corps, World Vision and Mercy Corps. Funded by OFDA, the grant to this Consortium allowed us to enhance the ability of international NGOs to prepare for and respond to humanitarian needs resulting from a conflict in Iraq. Aspects of such enhanced ability include strengthening the coordination of NGO assessment and planning activities in the region, providing a point of contact for inter-agency communication and liaison, improving information sharing and regular reporting within the NGO community and enabling consortium members to establish adequate contingency staffing, systems and resources in the region. We learned that this planning continued to play a key role in our ongoing operations. **We strongly recommend this type of planning and coordination whenever there is opportunity for advanced preparation.**

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.

As US military are increasingly 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.**

Additionally there is a need for "humanitarian space" for NGOs working in Iraq to provide assistance – this refers to physical and political space. We must remain neutral

and independent of the US military. If we are seen as one united operation -- military and humanitarian -- humanitarian workers in many parts of the world will be at risk of their lives because we'll be seen as taking sides.

This is an issue that is very real to us. Only three weeks ago, June 27, protesters angered by the deportation of five al Qaeda suspects unexpectedly attacked our office in Mangochi, Malawi and beat three of our staff. The protesters also attacked several churches in the immediate area of Mangochi. This incident was the first act of violence at one of our offices in 10 years of operating in Mangochi. Independence is our buffer between safety and risk.

Finally, large-scale contractor plans must include the input, consultation, and ownership of the Iraqi people. Without the partnership of the Iraqis, these schools, orphanages, hospitals, government works will continue to be targeted for looting and destruction. **The reconstruction strategy must emphasize Iraqi ownership.**

Recommendations

In May our primary recommendation was that the United States military must move quickly to establish a functioning police force that can restore order. But the main area of concern for Save the Children continues to be 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 organization must be maintained.

While many of us our focused on the war and Iraq, let me also note that there are over thirty wars now being waged around the world. One in four children worldwide live in one of these dangerous situations. In the past decade, more than 2 million children were killed during wartime, more than 4 million survived physical mutilation, and more than 1 million were orphaned or separated from their families as a result of war. I urge the members of this Committee to join Representative Shays in supporting the *Women and Children in Armed Conflict Protection Act of 200, HR 2356*. **The US government and NGOs must prioritize the protection needs of women and children in the onset of our humanitarian response.**

Finally, similar to Afghanistan, the only way to ensure a long-term commitment of funding by the greatest number of partners, as well as adequate support for international policing, is to demonstrate an international presence and leadership. **Save the Children supports an expanded role for the United Nations and other international partners for post conflict reconstruction.**

Again, our recommended solutions;

- **The differentiation between the role of humanitarian workers and the military must be made clear.**

- **The US government and NGOs must prioritize the protection needs of women and children in the onset of our humanitarian response.**
- **The role of the United Nations and other international partners in post conflict reconstruction must be expanded.**

Again, I thank you for the opportunity to testify before this committee.