



U.S. EMBASSY - BAGHDAD

2008 Provincial Reconstruction Team News

-Increasing Engineers Target of PRTs in Iraq-

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Wasit Province, Iraq - As Iraq strives to overcome decades of government mismanagement and neglect, increasing the number of engineers is essential to design, contract, construct and maintain the country's infrastructure, says Roberto Bran, Wasit Provincial Reconstruction Team's (PRT) engineer development program manager.

Executing reconstruction and stabilization projects is vital to the economic development of Iraq, he added, but "none of this will occur if there is no one to plan and design the infrastructure."

Ironically, Wasit's need for engineers has been highlighted by an increase in the provincial government's budget. While more money allows the provincial government to expand the number of new projects, work is limited by the number of engineers.

To address the potential shortage, the PRT, in coordination with other Coalition Forces and private and public sector Iraqi engineers, developed a program to improve the quality of current projects and boost the number of qualified engineers in the province.

The program's aim is strengthening the Engineering College of Wasit University and bolstering the Wasit Engineers Union.

The PRT's Brand said the focus is on professional development programs targeting mid-career professionals and taught by the faculty of the Engineering College. Six courses have been taught to date and 36 more are planned, said Bran.

Topics range from solid waste management, to hydraulic structures to structural analysis and design. The courses accommodate 20 students and are open to Iraqi Government and private sector engineers.

In addition the Wasit PRT is funding four laboratories and classrooms at the Wasit Engineering College at a cost of about \$2.5 million. The laboratories will accommodate 25 students while the classrooms will hold 60 students, said Bran. The new construction will feature a computer lab, a survey lab, a soil lab and an asphalt lab.



Roberto Bran (right), the Wasit PRT engineer development program manager, talks with Dr. Mansoor Manas, the dean of the Engineering College of Wasit University about the college's needs and upcoming projects. (Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Stacy Niles)

Unemployment is a major concern for students, who say it is hard to find jobs because most jobs require experience, something they don't have.

To that end, the engineering college plans an internship program which will offer paid and unpaid opportunities with contractors implementing the Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP) and Economic Support Fund (ESF) construction projects. Students will also work on Civil Military Cooperation and Gulf Regional South Corps of Engineers projects.

Also planned is an exchange program with academic and professional institutions abroad to establish long-term relationships between the engineering college and academic institutions in the United States.

Dr. Mansoor Manas, Dean of Wasit Engineering College, wants his students to be able to exchange ideas, receive training and gain knowledge. "I want them to be able to communicate with everyone especially in English," Manas said. "It is important that they always be encouraged."

Manas also wants to expand the college library to include current engineering textbooks, professional development magazines and an internet center.

Other PRTs work with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers on infrastructure projects throughout the Iraq. In Qadisiyah Province for example the PRT works in close coordination with the Army Corps of Engineers funding projects to construct:

- New feeder lines from existing substations for electricity generation in Al Mutaqaedin.
- A water station at Al Qadisiyah University.
- Sewer systems in Hay Alaroba and Hay Al Sadr.
- Paved roads in Hay Alforat, Hay Altaameem, Hamza village in Aal Ghanam and between Shafiyah and Noriyah.
- A public rehabilitation and health center at Al-Jumhoury
- Secondary schools.

More than 30 PRTs are now located in all 18 of Iraq's provinces. The State Department program has more than 800 volunteers helping to build Iraqi capacity in diverse areas like: governance, agriculture, business development, education and civil society building.

President Bush recently praised the PRTs work in Iraq noting, "Civic organizations are springing up. Institutions that sustain a free nation are strengthening. Our PRT in Karbala, for example, helped local residents establish a women's center that will provide education and promote equality.

Turning to the volunteers, the President added, "These people are helping improve the lives of [Iraqi] citizens they've never met before, and in so doing they're making this country more secure, and they're helping lay down a foundation for peace. And I want to thank them from the bottom of my heart."