



**USAID** | **IRAQ**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



## PRESS RELEASE

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

May 23, 2010

USAID-*Tijara* Press: (964) 7901-112-804

Email: [ddevoss@tijara-iraq.com](mailto:ddevoss@tijara-iraq.com)

[www.tijara-iraq.com](http://www.tijara-iraq.com)

### **NEW USAID PROGRAM TO HELP 5,000 YOUNG IRAQIS ACQUIRE SKILLS, FIND EMPLOYMENT, START NEW BUSINESSES**

**NAJAF, IRAQ** – A new private sector initiative designed by the USAID-*Tijara* Provincial Economic Growth Program to create employment opportunities for young Iraqis was inaugurated in Najaf today by U.S. Ambassador Christopher Hill, Najaf Provincial Council chairman Sheik Fayid Alshimari, Najaf Gov. Adnan Alzurfi and USAID Mission Director Christopher Crowley.

Funded with \$12 million from the U.S. Ambassador's Targeted Development Program, the project will offer young Iraqis living in underserved or impoverished areas essential business skills, entrepreneurial opportunities and the chance to qualify for loans to start their own businesses.

Thirteen young Iraqis proudly accepted microfinance loans at the inaugural ceremony. Each was chosen following a rigorous selection process that included five days of general business training, three days of private consultation and a day of questioning by a Business Review Panel assigned to judge the viability of their business plans.

An additional 25 young Iraqis presently are undergoing similar training which will be complete by the end of May.

Citing the Iraqi Youth Initiative's motto – *Build a Brighter Future* – Ambassador Hill challenged all of the youths in the room and throughout Iraq to take advantage of the Mustaqbal Youth Initiative. Sustainable employment opportunities for Iraq's youth, said Hill, are crucial to the creation of a more peaceful and prosperous Iraq.

Over 5,000 youths between the ages of 18 and 35 will benefit from the program, which is expected to create 2,500 full-time jobs. To insure the initiative's success, more than \$4.45 million is budgeted in individual and group loans for people who need financial assistance to start a business.

"With the withdrawal of U.S. Forces throughout the country and demand for foreign products and services on the rise, now is the optimal time to provide the youth of Iraq with the additional tools and skill sets to meet the future demands of the market," said Raymond Mendenilla, the director of USAID-*Tijara's* Iraqi Youth Initiative. "Today's young Iraqis will be tomorrow's leading entrepreneurs as Iraq's private sector continues to grow."

Implemented through USAID-*Tijara's* existing network of Microfinance institutions (MFIs) and Small Business Development Centers (SBDCs), the youth initiative has three components. A **Youth Employment Program** will recruit 1,600 individuals, of which 1,000 will be placed into apprenticeships while 500 receive permanent jobs. Those remaining will be trained for opportunities outside the program.

---

## The USAID Tijara Provincial Economic Growth Program

---

A total of 3,600 Iraqi youths will be invited to attend provincial **Youth Entrepreneurship Resource Centers**, where training to become a business owner will be given. Around 1,800 who excel at their studies and demonstrate a clear idea of the businesses they want to create will be invited to apply for an individual or group loan via the **Youth Entrepreneurship Access to Finance** program.

There is a clear need for a program dedicated to helping those seeking their first job or assistance starting a business of their own. At close to 30%, Iraq has the region's highest rate of unemployment. More than half of Iraq's young urban males are unemployed, while female participation in the workforce is, at 19%, even lower. Finding meaningful employment is critical to the creation of a more prosperous and stable society.

"This initiative will create jobs for new graduates and assist young entrepreneurs who currently don't have access to finance," said Paul Bruning, USAID/IRAQ's Director of Economic Growth and Agriculture. "Gainful employment and a stable business environment allow young people to start families and build better lives."

Iraqis between the ages of 18 and 35 are invited to visit one of USAID-*Tijara's* 15 SBDCs positioned around the country. Those who are selected to participate in the nationwide program will receive intensive business training, one-on-one consultations, mentoring by experienced business planners and guidance from microfinance officials who support youth friendly loans.

#####