



U.S. EMBASSY - BAGHDAD

2008 Provincial Reconstruction Team News

-PRT Friendship Market Will Boost Local Iraqi Economy-

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Al Hillah, Iraq - Because of years of neglect and conflict Iraqis have been denied what many in the West take for granted -- shopping for food in a clean and secure environment. That is about to change in Babil Province thanks to the effort of the local Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT).

There is no doubt that the existing Abu Gharaq Market in Babil is in crisis. The 23-year-old facility currently serves more than twice the number of people for which the structure was designed. Overcrowding, poor sanitation, and poor access have forced vendors to set up in nearby streets – a situation that has led to traffic snarls, increased crime and violence.

To address the problem, Babil PRT members and Iraqi dignitaries, government officials and tribal sheiks recently gathered to break ground on a new \$400,000 “Friendship Market.”

The Friendship Market will help meet the shopping needs of Abu Gharaq’s 125,000 residents by providing a low maintenance, sustainable, and user friendly market for the community. It is scheduled to open by April 2009, serving up to 3,000 people daily.

According to Captain Benjamin Kenion with U.S. Army Civil Affairs Battalion that partnered with the PRT on the project, “The new Friendship Market will be a distinct improvement over the existing Abu Gharaq market and is an excellent example of how the Babil PRT is working hand-in-hand with local government officials to meet the basic needs of the Iraqi population.”

The complex, which will have overhead protection from the weather, will be built on an 800 meter square plot. This new development will include 27 vendor booths, two supermarkets and a bakery.

The new market will use open walkways to allow for cross ventilation. To avoid congestion, the market also will have parking lots and be accessible via major roads. A high quality generator will ensure a constant source of electricity, while plumbing and sewage systems will provide proper sanitation. The market will even have areas for recreation and community events.



Lt. Colonel Mark A. Yanaway (center), Babil PRT Deputy Team Leader, helps lay the first cement for the new \$400,000 “Friendship Market” in Abu Gharaq, along with the Governor of Babil Province, Mr. Salim Salah Mahdi Al-Muslimawi (center left).

“We expect this new Friendship Market to have a significant economic impact on our local community by encouraging job development through promotion of small food and agricultural businesses and by acting as an outlet for local entrepreneurial activity,” said Aqueel Abdul Hadi Rakib, Mayor of Abu Gharaq.

In addition to the permanent jobs created by the market, at least 70% of the construction workers for the project will be hired from the local community, and once completed the market will serve as a reliable source of revenue for the Abu Gharaq sub district.

The Friendship Market is a joint project of the Babil PRT working in cooperation with various Iraqi governmental entities at the local, provincial and ministerial levels. While the Babil PRT funded the construction costs, the Abu Gharaq municipality is shouldering much of the responsibility for the project.

The municipality provided the market’s design and blue prints and will oversee the market’s construction and operation. Additionally, the city is repairing access roads and connections to the water and sewage systems.

Other Iraqi partners include the Babil Provincial Council, which donated the land and various Directors General (DGs) who provided technical support and approvals. The DGs represent numerous ministries including Planning and Buildings, Water, Electricity, Transportation and Communication.

“Transformation has long been a key theme of the coalition presence in Iraq,” said Lt. Colonel Mark Yanaway, Deputy Team Leader of the Babil PRT, at the ground breaking ceremony.

He added, “We seek to transform a command economy-driven dictatorship into a free-market democracy. Through the encouragement of the trade that will occur in this Friendship Market, we hope to support the growth of democracy in Abu Gharaq and the Province of Babil.”

The Babil PRT is part of the Iraq Provincial Reconstruction Team initiative, a U.S. civilian-military interagency effort that serves as the primary connection between U.S. and coalition partners and provincial and local governments in all of Iraq’s 18 provinces. For more information on the work of the Babil PRT, please visit http://iraq.usembassy.gov/prt_babil.html.