

UN Resident Coordinator's speech at the opening of the Arab Council for Population and Development Conference in Baghdad, Iraq

17 May 2023

*Your Excellency Rt. Hon. Prime Minister of the Republic of Iraq, Mr Mohammed Shia' Al-Sudani
Your Excellency, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Planning, Dr Muhammad Ali Tamim
Other ministers and senior government officials present here today,
Members of the diplomatic corps and representatives of international organizations,
Distinguished representatives of the League of Arab States
Ladies and gentlemen*

It gives me much pleasure to be here today to speak on behalf of the United Nations family, at this official opening of the regional population conference and launch of Iraq's National Population Policy.

Iraq's population, currently estimated at 43 million, is currently growing at a rate that is among the fastest in the world, mainly driven by high birth rates. This growth rate enlists valid concerns of high consumption and its impact on the environment, as well as challenges of budgeting for infrastructure, health, education, and pension programmes.

However, focusing exclusively on Iraq's population totals and growth rates misses the point, and could lead to coercive and counter-productive measures and the erosion of human rights. Ensuring that individuals, in particular women, can decide the number of children that they will have as well as the timing of their births through access to high-quality reproductive health-care services, can facilitate a drop in fertility and help to accelerate economic and social development.

Your Excellency, Iraq is also currently experiencing a remarkable surge in the number of young people in its demographic structure. This presents a unique opportunity. By investing in education, health, and employment opportunities for the youth right now, Iraq could harness their productivity in the medium term and significantly increase the positive, economic impact and pave the way for a more prosperous future of the country.

A conducive policy and legislative environment that promotes women's rights and opportunities for young people is crucial for Iraq's population program and development. I therefore want to congratulate Government for launching the National Population Policy that will guide different sectors on best ways of investing in human capital.

The UN system in Iraq stands ready to continue supporting governments efforts to achieve our shared vision of a more prosperous and stable Iraq.

I thank you.