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New court house opens in Baghdad

By Kendal Smith and Polli Keller
Gulf Region South District



Iraqi Prime Minister Maliki and Chief Justice Medhat, far right, cut the ceremonial ribbon opening the \$11.3 million new Justice Palace complex in Baghdad on Sept. 10, 2008. (USACE photo by Kendal Smith)

BAGHDAD, Iraq--"Iraq was the first country to introduce laws to the world and now it is important to bring back the rule of law to Iraq," said Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki at today's opening of the Rusafa Justice Palace in Baghdad.

With a ribbon-cutting ceremony, Prime Minister Maliki officially opened the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers built \$11.3 million new-construction facility. Members of the Higher Judicial Council and judicial members, Coalition forces, security teams and more than 30 international media crowded the central courtroom to over-

flowing to listen to the Iraqi judicial officers in the Justice Palace.

Prayers from the Koran and a moment of silence in the courtroom for all those judges and judicial workers who have been killed in past years under Saddam and during the turmoil of the past years led off the array of speakers.

Iraqi Chief Justice Medhat referred to the importance of the Justice Palace in establishing the rule of law in Iraq. Medhat gave thanks to the Coalition forces and a special recognition to the U.S. Army Corps



Iraqi Prime Minister Maliki addresses attendees of a Sept. 10, 2008, opening ceremony for the Justice Palace complex. Iraqi Chief Justice Medhat and U.S. Ambassador Ryan Crocker also spoke. (USACE photo by Kendal Smith)

of Engineers for the workmanship and diligence.

Serving approximately 1.2 million people of the Rusafa Qada and adjacent areas east of the Tigris River, the Central District (GRC), Gulf Region Division, project was completed by the GRC's Loyalty Resident Office.

Built by local Iraqi construction companies with quality assurance by the Loyalty RO, the compound consists of a court house, a witness security facility and 16 additional structures for security, maintenance and concessions.

Courtrooms, offices and conference rooms for the High Judicial Council of Iraq

are located in the two-story 10,200 square meter Court House. Secure, apartment-style living quarters for approximately 150 witnesses, and offices for the judges and other legal advisers are located in the 4,000 square-meter Witness Security Facility. The two buildings are joined by an enclosed corridor that allows witnesses and court officials to move between the facilities without exposure to danger. This structure is based on a generic courthouse design which serves as the model for all other new courthouse construction throughout Iraq.

The compound also includes closed circuit television, security cameras and an outer force protection wall with an entry control point and secure parking. Addi-



Attendees of the Sept. 10, 2008, opening ceremony gather outside the Rusafa Justice Palace. (USACE photo by Kendal Smith)

tional security measures include walk-thru metal detectors, ion detectors and X-ray machines.

Begun on Nov. 10, 2006, the Justice Palace was completed Aug. 19, 2008. During the 22 months of construction, the project management team worked through numerous delays. The contractor's progress was interrupted by unrest in Sadr City, where the majority of the labor force resides.

Several times during construction, the Government of Iraq imposed all-day curfews on citizens to prevent movement on the streets. Delivery trucks were banned as a precaution because stolen trucks were used to carry vehicle-borne improvised devices (VBIED).

This is rightly called the Palace of Justice, said U.S. Ambassador Ryan Crocker. "It was built by Iraqis for Iraqis. But as great as this building is, what it will be used for is even greater. Because it is in this palace that the common man will re-

ceive justice," he said. Crocker went on to thank all those involved in the heroic efforts to bring justice to Iraq.

"It was wonderful to have all the dignitaries and General Petraeus recognize the work it's taken to get this enormous project completed," summed up Loyalty Resident Office Engineer Derrick Mitchell. "Having been through this project's trials and tough times over all 22 months of construction, it's a beautiful thing to see it today."

The reconstruction of Iraq is about reconstructing justice as well. Rusafa is one of two major GRC projects for the reconstruction of the "rule of law" in Iraq. The other is the \$21.5 million Anbar Judicial Complex in Ramadi, now under renovation and construction. Phase 1 is to be finished by the end of October. Phase 2 will complete the project by June 30, 2009.



Ceremonial Guards post at the entrance to the Justice Palace at Rusafa, Iraq, prior to an opening ceremony Sept. 10, 2008. Construction was completed Aug. 19, 2008. (USACE photo by Kendal Smith)

Note: Kendal Smith is a public affairs officer with the Gulf Region Central district, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Iraq.

For more information, contact Kendal at 540-665-2644 or email requests to Lesie.K.Smith@usace.army.mil.

Polli Barnes Keller is a public affairs officer with the Gulf Region Division district, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Iraq. For more information, contact Polli at (540) 665-5344 or email requests to CEGRD.PAO@usace.army.mil.

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