



For Immediate Release  
 September 27, 2008  
 U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

## *Kirkuk is between big projects and huge ambitions*

By Hassan Mohammad  
 Gulf Region North District



Col. Margaret Burcham, Commander of the Gulf Region North district, and Ted Kunzog, contracting director, were part of the GRN team that gave a three-day outreach in Kirkuk Province last month. The outreach program was the idea of the commanding general, Multinational Division-North; initiated by GRN and designed to help mentor Iraqi Provincial governments and construction contractors on business processes in reconstruction of their infrastructure. [USACE Photo]

Baghdad, Iraq - Kirkuk, Iraq—After being out of Iraq for six years, I arrived on the forefront of oil-rich and multi-ethnic Kirkuk Province—with Arab, Kurdish, Turkmen, and others nationalities—expecting to see a unique urban city. But the hands of the overthrown former regime destroyed this city like many others in Iraq.

Let us think, for a while, about the other parts of Iraq—the north and the south. These two regions have suffered from destruction and fatal policies applied

by the former regime. During the 1980s, the north—where the Kurds reside, and the south—where the Shi'a reside, were full of hunger, death, blood, orphans, and widows. Sadness was the dominant feature on the face, like my mother's face when she hugged me for the last time, on my last night in Iraq.

I thought when I left the country, sadness would leave me and I would start a new and happy life. But, the opposite is true. Every Iraqi leaves his soul behind in

those meadows of green Iraq, in those spiritual cities, traditional streets and buildings, old houses, libraries, rivers, banks, tea cafes, and lovers' corners in the universities. Fate brought me back to my homeland. And recently, as an employee with the US Army Corps of Engineers—Gulf Region North district team, we went together to Kirkuk. It was an unbelievable feeling for me; boys and girls waving to us while taking care of their herds of sheep. Women with long black traditional dress make me full of tears. They are the tears of enjoyment despite the deficiency in public services and most importantly the fragile security situation. But people still have hope and I see them full of optimism about the future of their country.

The hands of the former regime were the hands that planted evil and death, but now I see hands planting good and beauty. That's what my new employer, GRN, does under the command of Col. Margaret Burcham. The district has project and construction management for more than 1,400 reconstruction projects in the seven Northern provinces of Iraq; Salah ad Din, Ninawa, Kirkuk, Diyala, Sulaymaniya, Erbil, and Duhuk.

GRN consists of 400 service members and Army civilians with high capabilities in engineering and administration. They work tirelessly 10 – 12 hours daily (or more!), seven days a week in order to succeed at their mission.

Col. Burcham took command of GRN in mid-July and is implementing the Provincial Construction Outreach Program to help mentor the Iraqis to work at their provincial level, and to educate the Kirkuk Provincial council about USACE project and construction management processes. A breakout of the agenda included discussion of the steps toward awarding a contract and capacity-development for Iraqi construction contractors.

The outreach program was planned and

presented by a GRN leadership team. The first of the three-day session was with the brigade combat teams and the Provincial Reconstruction Team members, with the GRN leadership team providing project construction and management information that directly leads to achieving the end-result.

"This will assist the local government in rebuilding their infrastructure," Burcham told the group.

Based on my personal experiences and direct contact with the living reality here, I appreciate serious discussion about infrastructure issues—infrastructure that has been severely damaged (and neglected) for decades. There are urgent needs regarding schools, hospitals, electricity; potable water, sewage, and other basic services. The Gulf Region Division has made great efforts and achieved huge and unique projects during the last four years in all Iraqi provinces. It is well-known that Iraq had been destroyed under the dictatorship for 35 years; together with the wars and other disasters occurring during Saddam's era.

A few days ago, I contacted one of my brothers in the village of Khnaqeen, in the Diyala Province. I asked about basic services in his area. He said they do not have enough classrooms in the school. The school, he said, remains the same size, although the student body has grown. They have insufficient medications and equipment in the hospital; and their homes certainly lack sufficient power and water services.

During the outreach in Kirkuk, Program Manager Tiffany Ferguson presented a thorough overview of reconstruction projects in Kirkuk and US Government financial support...and Director of Contracting Ted Kunzog explained the process by which potential construction contractors bid and compete for reconstruction projects. There was much discussion regarding employment opportunities for the peo-

ple of Kirkuk. One of the Corp of Engineers' goals is to create job opportunities for the locals by establishing reconstruction projects. These projects have helped alleviate some of Iraq's unemployment.

Unfortunately, protests against the provincial elections in Kirkuk and terrorist attacks prevented us from having the second day's session with members of Kirkuk's Provincial leaders.

However, the third day's session with local construction contractors was successful and productive, with many local contractors attending. During the three-hour session, the local construction contractors learned of the intent of the outreach program, as well as the overall reconstruction program in the Kirkuk province. They expressed a desire for contracts to be granted only to the local people of Kirkuk, to enhance and support the community's economic growth. Kunzog said such procedure is possible. Prior to leaving the meeting hall, those attending thanked Burcham and her team for GRN's support.

I close with a reference to the American Presidents who "preferred action over speeches." Actions, indeed, are louder than speeches—and likewise, the Reconstruction projects the US Army Corps of Engineers has managed have replaced at least some of the damage done by wars, dictatorship, and terrorists.

Note: Hassan Mohammad is the bilingual, bicultural advisor for the Gulf Region North district, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Iraq. He is an Iraqi-born American citizen. For more information, contact him at (540) 542-1173 or e-mail requests to [hassan.d.mohammad@usace.army.mil](mailto:hassan.d.mohammad@usace.army.mil). For information on the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in Iraq, visit [www.grd.usace.army.mil](http://www.grd.usace.army.mil).