



SUCCESS STORY

Referendum Sees High Turnout

Iraqis vote to ratify their new constitution



Photo: Associated Press

An Iraqi woman casts her ballot on the constitution at a polling site.

USAID trained tens of thousands of election monitors to ensure that the October 15, 2005 referendum on Iraq's new constitution would be free and fair.

Women with children, men in suits, and young men and women in casual attire quietly awaited their turn at the local school. People divided by ethnic, economic, and religious rifts, had all come together on October 15, 2005 for one purpose — to vote for Iraq's constitution. They all left with one characteristic in common — an index finger dyed purple after they voted.

"We need our own constitution," said one election worker, "we need to understand our duties and our rights."

A Turkoman woman wearing a colorful shawl across her graying hair manned one ballot station. She stamped each numbered ballot as she tore it off and handed it to a voter. Her stamp ensured that the ballot is official. When asked why she came to support the election — a risky decision, as insurgents threatened to attack polling stations — she replied that although she is ethnically Turkoman, "I want to be part of Iraq."

USAID funded training for thousands of Iraqi election workers who ensured that the polling stations were run in an efficient, orderly, and fair manner. Each polling station had one political party observer and one domestic observer. In all, USAID helped train 10,000 accredited monitors and over 30,000 political party observers who made the referendum a success.

Leading up to the referendum, USAID also supported an extensive campaign to educate voters about the constitution and to include them in the process. Over 78,000 Iraqis attended 3,000 constitutional dialogue discussions sponsored throughout Iraq. USAID distributed over 700,000 pamphlets on the constitution in both Arabic and Kurdish. USAID also sponsored television programs, discussions, and posters throughout the country to ensure that all Iraqis included their voice in the constitution. According to one poll worker, about half the voters had actually read the constitution and everyone knew the key issues.

On referendum day, over 60 percent of eligible voters casted ballots. In the final tally, 78 percent of those who voted approved ratifying the new constitution.