

## **Senate Democratic Policy Committee Hearing**

### **“An Oversight Hearing on the Bush Administration’s Plan to Rebuild Iraq’s Hospitals, Clinics and Health Care System: What Went Wrong?”**

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Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee, it is an honor to be here today, to talk about the programs in support of our strategy for reconstruction in Iraq.

Through my one year of residence in the United States, I can see how collaboration and partnership between the Iraqis and the American people are the cornerstones in the nation-building process in Iraq. Our aim is a healthy, free, democratic nation geared to lead the region in health as it did during the 1980s.

When I decided to study health policy as a line of specialty in early 2004, I was strongly motivated by the fact that my country is witnessing a new era, and I am glad to take part in its foundation. Through my years of work in health, I noticed a major bottleneck that hampered much advancement in health care was inadequate health planning and policy setting. Three years after the collapse of the previous regime, Iraq still does not have a clear policy regarding a number of vital issues related to health, such as health financing schemes, human resource redevelopment and information management systems. I don’t see how building highly sophisticated hospitals can improve health of Iraqis if there were no legislations to administrate them, no health professionals to deliver the service and no maintained system of supplies and equipment to ensure their functionality. In my view, unless a policy is set for health, every effort in the reconstruction process may fail to bring about sustainable results.

Ladies and gentlemen, the World Health Organization has dedicated this year to address health workers, the heart of health systems, and the people who provide health care to those who need it. Here, I would like to dedicate my time to address loss of human capital in Iraq, brain drain of health professionals and the assassinations and killings that are targeting the best of our experts in various specialties. Their absence has negatively impacted health care delivery and medical education in Iraq. Brain drain has also burdened fresh experts who now have to deal with emergencies and heavy workload under daily insurgency and attacks. All this is taking place in hospital set-ups where doctors have to find creative methods to perform their tasks in the absence of required

supplies and equipment, at a time when millions of dollars are allocated to health care services.

Although I cannot directly address corruption, I strongly believe that any wasted resources, human or financial, are considered administrative corruption. Another area I cannot tackle is the daily insurgency, though it is affecting every aspect of health care since patients do not attend clinics and, if they do, they many not find doctors due to security situation.

Despite these realities, I still see hope. I see number of immediate actions that the U.S. politicians can take to assist in terms of human resources. The relocation of threatened doctors to safer regions in Iraq such as Kurdistan is an option that can benefit both parties. As the Kurdistan region is currently enjoying peace and security, and has initiated the process of advancing health care delivery, our medical experts can take part and assist the Kurdish institutions in delivering care until better times allow them to return to the central and southern regions.

For the new, fresh medical doctors who are obliged by workload and demand to provide medical advice in areas where they do not have enough training, I see the opportunity for 10-week observership and internships programs in medical schools and teaching hospitals overseas a beneficial short-term intervention that would introduce them to the wonderful U.S. community, and also to medical advisements in their areas of specialty. Such short visits can help them have the vision to determine their future direction.

The U.S. student and visitor exchange programs have so far provided number of opportunities for Iraqis to learn and excel in the best American academic institutions. Some of those students have completed their studies and others will soon be ready to go back home, with mixed feelings of hope and fear. If those students are granted job opportunities in positions where they can push the process towards stability and advancement, they will form the steering force in the process of change, and will surely provide their institutions with fresh thinking and updated knowledge – all of which is much needed and can be well invested toward a better, healthier Iraq.

Again, I would like to thank the committee for the opportunity to share my perspective as a woman from Iraq. I hope that this statement will be beneficial in helping to state the goals of Iraq.

Thank you.