



BACKGROUND:

The Marla Ruzicka Iraqi War Victims Fund

“This program has provided assistance to individuals, families, and entire communities harmed as a result of coalition military operations. To date 1,311 projects have been implemented directly assisting nearly 2 million war victims and their family members.”

--Henrietta H. Fore, Administrator, U.S. Agency for International Development and Director of United States Foreign Assistance.¹

¹ Quotation from Henrietta Fore's testimony at the FY 2009 Budget Hearing for Foreign Assistance Senate Appropriations Committee Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Agencies, March 4, 2008.

The U.S. works hard to avoid harm to civilians in combat, yet Iraqi children, women, and men have been killed and injured by U.S. and Coalition operations. They are often left to pick up the pieces of their lives. The Marla Ruzicka Iraqi War Victims Fund (Marla Fund) helps individuals and their families rebuild by providing health care and prosthetics, restoring livelihoods through the creation of businesses or the provision of livestock and goods, and/or rebuilding homes destroyed by the war.

Administered through USAID under the Iraq Community Action Program (ICAP), the Marla Fund is implemented by four international non-governmental organizations with local Iraqi staff on the ground with each NGO responsible for a particular region of the country. Beneficiaries and local communities are involved in every aspect of these programs from design to prioritization to implementation. By the end of 2005, Iraqi communities had contributed \$37.4 million worth of their own resources to humanitarian projects through land, labor, materials, and other mechanisms.¹

History

Marla Ruzicka—CIVIC's founder—saw the human cost of war first-hand in Afghanistan and Iraq, and made it her mission to help civilians suffering losses inadvertently caused by the U.S. military. As the war unfolded in Iraq, Marla moved to Baghdad and conducted door-to-door surveys to fill the information vacuum on victims of U.S. operations.

In 2003, Marla took her data straight to Washington policymakers to tell them about war victims she'd met—those harmed by U.S. forces—but who had never seen an American face. She succeeded in convincing the U.S. Government to provide assistance to Iraqi civilians through legislation sponsored by Senator Patrick J. Leahy (D-VT). The Emergency Wartime Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2003, authorized funds to provide “assistance for families of innocent Iraqi civilians who suffer losses as a result of military operations” (Public Law 108-11). In 2005, this fund became the Marla Ruzicka Iraqi War Victims Fund following Marla's tragic death as a result of a suicide bomb in Baghdad.

Funding

To date, Congress has appropriated \$65 million for the Marla Ruzicka Iraqi War Victims Fund. Congress allocated \$10 million to the Marla Fund in the 2009 Emergency Supplemental Appropriations bill and \$5 million in the 2010 budget.

Impact

According to a 2008 USAID audit of the program, 350,000 Iraqis had directly benefited from the Marla Fund, while an additional 1.5 million Iraqis have benefited indirectly.² During FY

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2007 and 2008, the implementing partners collectively completed 1,004 projects all over Iraq directly assisting over 40,000 war victim family members for a total of \$15 million while local communities and local government bodies contributed \$1 million each to Marla Fund projects. These funds also helped 8,744 people establish new businesses and/or other income generating opportunities.”³

In 2009, the Marla Fund implementing partner for Anbar Province and South Central Iraq completed 217 projects, 89% of which created opportunities for sustainable income generation for beneficiaries. Projects included the construction of various shops such as a small food or clothes store, the supply of cows, animal feed and suitable corrals, and the provision of tools and supplies for businesses. To date, this Marla partner alone has completed 1,300 projects and continues to identify civilians who have not yet received help and are in great need of assistance. A 2009 survey found that 90% of businesses established by this partner through the Marla Fund were still operational at the end of 2009. The implementing organization closely monitors projects to ensure high quality implementation and improve the success rate of Marla Fund projects.⁴

According to the implementing partners, the Fund not only generates a sense of community and hope for the future, but also goodwill toward Americans as recipients are deeply grateful for the assistance.

CIVIC continues to work with Congress, USAID, and the implementing partners to ensure the program is working as intended and to ensure continued funding.

Yesmina’s Story

Yesmina’s husband was killed by crossfire during fighting between insurgents and coalition forces in 2004, leaving her with two children and no income. Her parents took her in, but they struggled to support the entire family.

In 2007, the Marla Fund provided a small grant to Yesmina and her father to open a grocery shop in their village. The grant provided enough start-up capital to rent space in an appropriate location and stock the shop with groceries and necessities. The shop has resulted in a complete turnaround for the family, providing them with \$30 a day in profits, which enables them to live more comfortably.

Yesmina’s father, who manages the shop, is enthusiastic about his newfound commercial success. He beams when talking about the prospects for the future for his grandchildren and daughter. For the first time since his son-in-law’s death, he says, his daughter and her children are able to look to the future with a sense of hope.⁵

For success stories and additional information:

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3 Statement of John Chromy, Vice President, CHF International, at the hearing on Assistance For Civilian Victims Of War for the Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs, United States Senate, April 07, 2009.

4 Information provided by CHF International.

5 The names in this story have been changed for security reasons. For full story, see ACIDI/VOCA, “USAID Marla Ruzicka War Victims Assistance Fund Helps Family Rebuild their Lives in Iraq”, <http://www.acdivoca.org/acdivoca/PortalHub.nsf/ID/IraqBrighterFuture>

Campaign for Innocent Victims in Conflict works on behalf of war victims by advocating that warring parties recognize and help the civilians they harm. CIVIC supports the principle that it is never acceptable for a warring party to ignore civilian suffering. In 2005, CIVIC’s founder Marla Ruzicka was killed in Iraq by a suicide bomb while advocating for families of victims. CIVIC honors her legacy and strives to sustain her vision.

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