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Kurdistan Business Agenda Launched in Iraq

ARBIL, IRAQ – On November 15, 2007, a coalition of Kurdish business associations presented its Kurdistan Business Agenda (KBA) to the Kurdistan Regional Government. An unprecedented effort in Iraq, the agenda will serve as a powerful advocacy tool for the private sector and shows that the Kurdish business community is determined to play a positive role in Iraq's democratic and economic development.

Minister of Tourism of the Kurdistan Regional Government Nimrud Baito said that the "KBA is a good step... to coordinate between the government and the private sector. For the region to prosper, the private sector has to develop and participate in the process of economic development."

A business agenda is a tool developed by the private sector and used to effect public policy reform by setting legislative and regulatory priorities and clearly communicating them to decision-makers. The Kurdistan Business Agenda was developed with the support of the Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE), based on the CIPE national business agenda model.

The KBA is the first of its kind in Iraq and includes both the needs of individual industries and of the business community as a whole. Notably, the agenda identifies cross-cutting problems that have a negative effect on all business sectors, and proposes coordinated dialogue between the government and private sector to develop solutions. Among the biggest issues identified in the agenda are weak infrastructure, an underdeveloped financial sector, and inadequate worker skills.

The KBA is the culmination of one year of continuous work in the face of numerous security and organizational challenges. Under the guidance of CIPE Iraq program director Khaled Bakleh, the

coalition formed committees representing key industry sectors, which met as many as 30 times to identify their needs. CIPE representative Dr. Nabil Al Ethari provided feedback and technical assistance, and after an extensive review and revision process, the final KBA was compiled. The agenda is available in Kurdish, Arabic, and English (www.cipe.org/iraq).

The launch event was attended by 157 participants, including representatives of the Kurdistan investment board, Kurdish universities, Kurdish governors, the prime minister's economic consultants, and representatives of international organizations.

The Kurdistan Business Agenda project was made possible through funding from the National Endowment for Democracy.

The Center for International Private Enterprise is a non-profit affiliate of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and one of the four core institutes of the National Endowment for Democracy. CIPE has supported more than 1,000 local initiatives in over 100 developing countries, involving the private sector in policy advocacy and institutional reform, improving governance and building understanding of market-based democratic systems. CIPE provides management assistance, practical experience and financial support to local organizations to strengthen their capacity to implement democratic and economic reforms. CIPE programs are also supported through the United States Agency for International Development.

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