



IOM International Organization for Migration
OIM Organisation Internationale pour les Migrations
OIM Organizacion Internacional para las Migraciones
Iraq Out-of-Country Voting Program

Congress of the United States
Washington
DC 20515

16 January 2005

Dear Congresswomen and Congressmen,

Thank you for your interest in the Iraq Out-of-Country Voting (OCV) Program.

The Independent Electoral Commission of Iraq (IECI), as the exclusive election authority in Iraq, has asked the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to conduct the Iraq OCV Program. When requested to conduct the initial assessment for an OCV Program for the Iraqi Transitional National Assembly, IOM indicated to the IECI that due to time constraints it would only be possible to conduct a limited operation. The operational concept presented by IOM to the IECI in November 2004 envisaged the establishment of registration and polling facilities only in the capital cities of host countries.

The decision to offer the OCV Program was taken by the IECI only a very short time before the election. The IECI faced a choice between an imperfect system which allows a great number of Iraqis outside Iraq to participate, or no voting outside Iraq at all. The IECI made it clear that it would be better to offer to some rather than none, knowing that there would be those who would feel disadvantaged.

Despite the short timeframe, the Iraq OCV Program has been able to extend operations to a number of additional locations. In the US, rather than limiting facilities only to Washington DC as originally planned, the Program will establish facilities in four additional cities; Chicago, Detroit, Los Angeles and Nashville. This has been possible due to the tireless work of OCV staff in the United States and to the generous support of the Iraqi community.

The Iraq OCV Program conducted an extensive analysis of demographic data when determining in which cities to establish facilities. Sources included US government data and data from the Iraqi community. The Iraq OCV Program also took into account geographic factors and accessibility when deciding locations.

As you mention in your letter of 13 January, the Iraqi population in California is dispersed throughout communities in San Diego, Los Angeles, and North and Central California. With only one location possible on the West Coast, we chose to locate facilities in Los Angeles, which is a central point and a transport hub to which all communities in the Western States have access, rather than locating facilities on either extremity.

Please understand that the Iraq OCV Program does not wish to place obstacles in the way of Iraqi participation. However, with only days remaining before the start of registration, it is operationally impossible to extend our current facilities while keeping to international democratic standards.

Even if it were possible, establishing further facilities would set a precedent which we could not apply across all fourteen host countries. There are large Iraqi communities in other countries that do not share the level of political support enjoyed by the Iraqi community in California but that face far greater distances and challenges to reach facilities. Establishing additional facilities in this case would leave my organization open to charges of inconsistency at the expense of communities with less political weight, which would undermine the credibility of the entire operation.



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I sincerely hope that this sufficiently clarifies our position. I remain optimistic that you can convey to your constituents the monumental efforts that have been undertaken by my organization to give them facilities on the West Coast of the United States and that you can encourage that all travel to participate. Many communities world wide are mobilized to travel and vote and I hope their efforts can be replicated in California and across the United States. It is in the interest of all Iraqis that as many as possible participate in this important election and have a voice in their country's future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Peter Erben". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the beginning.

Peter Erben
Director
Iraq Out-of-Country Voting Program