

US to grant Jordan \$275m in aid

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Money to be spent on financing several water projects in Zarqa governorate

Amman The US says it will grant Jordan a \$275 million to finance major water projects in the Kingdom, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said during her short visit to Amman on Thursday.

"We have worked very hard for many years on this grant and it was in partnership with the Jordanian government and in consultation with experts and academics," Clinton said during a joint press conference with Minister of Foreign Affairs Nasser Judah and Minister of Planning and International Co-operation Jaafar Hassan.

The aid, granted by the US Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), is to be used to implement several water projects in the Governorate of Zarqa, in the north eastern part of Amman.

Created by the US Congress in January 2004, Millennium Challenge Corporation is a non-profit government organisation which works with some of the poorest countries in the world to reduce poverty by promoting sustainable economic growth.

Clinton added that the projects would provide more than one million people with reliable access to clean drinking water.

They would also create a large number of jobs for Jordanians, she added.

Hassan said the US grant would contribute to around one-fifth of the capital expenditure to be allocated to the water sector in the next three years, adding that the projects would reduce water loss in Zarqa from the current 47 per cent to 35 per cent. The money would also increase the quantity of treated water by 50 per cent and raise water pumping by 50 per cent.

Living standards

"We hope this year to see the highest level of overall US assistance to the Kingdom," Hassan said.

Projects to be implemented under the grant agreement would help improve the governorate's health, environment and living standards in general, the minister has said previously.

Hassan said the water projects were expected to help deliver about 100 million cubic metres of treated water when they were complete. The minister said the water would be vital for the area, which hosts a significant number of factories and plants.

During Clinton's visit to Amman, she held talks with King Abdullah II on several issues, including the peace talks between the Palestinians and Israelis, and bilateral relations.

The top US diplomat's short trip to the Jordanian capital came one day after the US embassy issued a travel warning of an "imminent threat" in the southern Gulf of Aqaba region, a warning which was disputed by Jordan.

Jordanian Minister of State for Media Affairs and Communications Ali Ayed stressed that "Jordan relies on its security bodies to evaluate the security situation in the Kingdom".

Security alert

The Jordanian minister's press statement came in response to a security alert issued on Wednesday by the United States embassy in Amman in which US citizens in Jordan were warned against travelling to the southern port city of

Aqaba.

“Credible information has been received regarding a possible imminent threat in the Gulf of Aqaba region”, the US embassy said on its website.

“The US embassy recommends that all non-official and personal travel to Aqaba be deferred for at least the next 48 hours. For those citizens resident in Aqaba, the downtown and port areas should be avoided if possible,” the embassy said without elaborating.

Ali Ayed was quoted by the Jordan News Agency in Petra as saying: “the recent attacks against Aqaba were launched from outside Jordanian territory”.

This was in reference to the attack last August when a Grad-type rocket fell on a street in the city, killing a taxi driver and injuring four others. That time, Jordan said that the rocket was launched from the Sinai Peninsula.

The Philippine embassy in Jordan also urged its citizens on Thursday to postpone travels to Aqaba in the next 24 hours. Media reports said the embassy also advised those already living in Aqaba to exercise caution amid security concerns in the area.

The advisory was also reportedly relayed to Filipino community leaders in Jordan through text messages, requesting them to pass on the warning to other Filipinos in the country.

reaching out

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