Acceptance speech by Dr Fatih Birol on the occasion of being decorated two special awards by the Government of Iraq

Embassy of the Republic of Iraq, Paris, 21 May 2013

Your excellencies, ladies and gentlemen

It is a great honour to receive these awards from the Deputy Prime Minister, Hussein Al-Shahristani and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hoshyar Zebari. I am delighted to be receiving this special award in the presence of so many ambassadors and distinguished guests.

I have worked on many projects through my career, but this has been a very special one. The Iraq Energy Outlook, I am happy to say, has become a reference piece whenever industry, policy makers and experts consider Iraq.

I have also heard from Dr Shahristani that it is now being used in Iraq as a “guiding tool” for decision makers there. I am happy to let you know that an Arabic translation of the book has now been completed, the first copy of which I would like to hand to you, Mr Ambassador. We will ship a large number of these books to Iraq this week, and will make the book available online as well.

The idea for this project—first envisioned together with Ambassador Fareed and Dr Shahristani in Paris in 2011—has since had great support from both. This support has contributed a great deal to its success.

It was by no means an easy or normal task; Iraq is vitally important for global energy markets, and this was the first time we as the IEA has written a report on an OPEC member country in such depth, and a country in transition, which presented many unique challenges.

It was also built on local engagement. My colleagues and I had several missions to Baghdad, Erbil and Basra, where we met with Dr Shahristani, Mr Thamir Ghadhban, Dr Ashti Hawrami and a number of officials from the South Oil Company and high level representatives from the Government of Iraq.
We worked with the Iraqi Authorities, with Iraqi and International companies, and had a very helpful workshop in Istanbul with renowned Iraqi and international experts. I can assure you that carrying out an original in-depth study that adds value, while at the same time having a large number of stakeholders on board was not an easy task.

The results of our report showed that almost every second barrel of world oil production growth in the next two decades will come from Iraq, with the potential to provide prosperity for all of Iraq’s 32 million people. We also outlined in the report what need to be done by the Iraqi authorities to realize such a major transformation.

Following a press launch in London on October 9, I flew to Baghdad for a press conference with Dr Shahristani to launch the book there on 10 October, fulfilling a promise I had made to the deputy prime minister at the early stages of our work. I would like to thank, again, Dr Fareed and his staff, and also Usama Karim for their help with this.

The report received a great deal of coverage from the press, and was widely covered in international media across the world, including by several TV channels and newspapers. And I was very happy that our OPEC colleagues in Vienna covered it extensively in the OPEC Bulletin.

I would like to thank all IEA governments, but especially the UK, Turkish, Italian and US governments and to EC for their support throughout the study.

I would like to thank my colleagues, the Executive Director, Maria van der Hoeven, the Deputy Executive Director, Richard Jones as well as all IEA colleagues. I would like to especially thank my colleagues in the Iraq team (mentioning names...). For this special work, the WEO team has been strengthened by the addition of Mustafa al-Maliki and Sabah Al-Khishali who were seconded from the Iraqi government, as well as Ali Al-Saffar.

Another unexpected benefit of this work was that I got to know Dr Tariq Shafiq, who is one of the legendary figures of the Iraqi oil industry, and whose personal history has followed the ups and downs of the history of Iraq, and who helped tremendously with the study.

I talked a lot about oil and prosperity, but we should all remember that when we speak of Iraq, we are speaking of a land of the oldest civilizations and cultural history of over 10 000
years. As the great French Orientalist, Jacques Berque, said “more poets lived in the city of Baghdad than in all of France in all times”

So in keeping with that spirit, I would like to finish by citing the great Iraqi poet, Mohammed Mahdi Al-Jawahiri whose poems penetrated the soul of millions of Iraqis, Arabs and others in the Middle East and beyond. He said:

“Peace be upon the plateaus of Iraq, and on its rivers and its plains. Peace be upon the light of the ages, the house of peace”

Once again, thank you very much for this honour Mr Ambassador.