



**U.S. EMBASSY – BAGHDAD**  
**News Release**



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Phone: +964-770-443-0048  
[BaghdadPressOffice@state.gov](mailto:BaghdadPressOffice@state.gov)

**American Ambassador Visits Najaf and  
Announces Major Youth Initiative Program**

U.S. Ambassador Christopher R. Hill visited Najaf on May 23<sup>rd</sup> as part of the continuing U.S. effort to solidify a long-term relationship with Iraq. During the visit he met with Governor Adnan Zurfi, held a Town Hall meeting with students at Kufa University, and announced the Iraqi Youth Initiative (IYI), a program that will create employment opportunities for Iraqi youth. Throughout the visit the Ambassador highlighted U.S. assistance efforts in Najaf, led by the U.S. Embassy's Provincial Reconstruction Team and closely coordinated with the provincial government.

The Iraqi Youth Initiative is a national \$12 million program administered by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) that will provide training and loans to 18-35 year old Iraqis looking to enter new professions or expand current business ventures. At least 5,000 youth throughout Iraq will participate in the first phase of the program which is expected to create 2,500 new jobs. The program will generate a portfolio of \$5 million worth of individual and group loans that will help start or expand businesses and be managed through 12 Youth Entrepreneurship Resource Centers across Iraq.

Speaking of the importance of programs like IYI that invest in Iraqi youth, Ambassador Hill pointed out, "It is really the youth of Iraq that will determine the strength of our relationship, and I'm here today to help build the foundation of partnership between our two nations."

Earlier in the day Ambassador Hill visited Kufa University where he met the university President and held a Town Hall meeting with 150-200 students. He engaged in a broad range of topics with students from different disciplines and stressed the importance of youth and cultural exchanges between the two countries as part of our commitment to a long-term partnership with Iraq. Kufa University is part of a larger U.S. Embassy-funded program linking Iraqi and U.S. universities that will strengthen partnerships and curriculum development and research in fields jointly identified by the governments of Iraq and the United States.

Governor Zurfi met with Ambassador Hill and his delegation in his office, and then hosted a lunch at the Governor's compound where they were joined by other provincial leaders. The Governor and Ambassador Hill held friendly and productive discussions that focused on the importance of building strong business and cultural ties with the people of Najaf. Ambassador Hill also congratulated Governor Zurfi on Najaf's selection as the capital of Islamic Culture in 2012.

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