



U.S. EMBASSY - BAGHDAD

2008 Provincial Reconstruction Team News

-Breathing the Same Air as Iraqi Counterparts-

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May 25, 2008

Tallil, Dhi Qar Province - Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) working directly with locals are being emulated as successful development models by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) like the United Nations/World Bank's International Reconstruction Fund Facility for Iraq (IRFFI).

On May 18 and 19, IRFFI officials traveled from around the world to the Dhi Qar PRT's Camp Mittica Training Center at Tallil to hold their first field trip inside Iraq.

Team Leader Anna Prouse said, "My goal was to demonstrate to the donors that there is only one way to be successful in Iraq: breathe the same air our Iraqi counterparts breathe. How can it be done from a distance? How can it be done through an intermediary?"

"I believe that after this field trip, it was obvious to the various agencies that the way we are doing business here in Dhi Qar – constantly interacting, constantly having our boots out on the ground – is the way to go."

Dhi Qar was chosen by IRFFI, in part, because of its successful example as a province under Provincial Iraqi Control (PIC), whose local government is making great strides in development. The NGO also wanted to see how PRT experts embedded in Dhi Qar and how its volunteers interact with local community leaders and activists.

At present, IRFFI relies on locally employed Iraqis to oversee its programs in the Province, but hopes to emulate the PRT example and move non-Iraqi experts into the province to establish a strong local presence. The PRT showed how it could be done.

The UN and World Bank launched IRFFI in 2004 to address pressing reconstruction needs in Iraq. It currently has 25 international donors who have pledged \$1.83 billion to two trust funds -- \$496 million in the World Bank Iraq Trust Fund and \$1.33 billion in the UN Development Group Iraq Trust Fund.

Chairman of the IRFFI Donors Committee, Ambassador Gianludovico de Martino of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, led the group that came to Dhi Qar, which included representatives from the IRFFI Secretariat, the European Parliament, the European Commission, and the donor countries of Denmark, Japan, the United States and Italy.



The Nassiriyah band plays original musical pieces at the newly reopened Ziggurat Convention centre during a dinner and cultural evening for the IRFFI sponsored by the Dhi Qar PRT.

The Dhi Qar PRT was determined to expand the focus of the meeting beyond development by presenting the province's unique heritage and vibrant cultural scene. The participants were provided a feast of sights and sounds that included music, art, poetry, film, food and drama. The aim was to demonstrate the many facets of Dhi Qar and why its people are so proud of their culture and heritage and so determined to build a better future.

In his introduction to the music which kicked off the event, the Iraqi host summarized it well when he stated: "Like a phoenix rising from the ashes, Iraq is back. Iraq has gone through a gloomy time, but the light is at the end of the tunnel. Iraq is more than violence and bloodshed. Welcome to Nassiriyah, the land of civilization."

The Nassiriyah band demonstrated the sophistication of Dhi Qar culture, presenting original musical pieces featuring a combination of local and western instruments in complex arrangements.

The walls of the conference venue were lined with colorful semi-abstract paintings by a Nassiriyah artist, depicting the ongoing transformation of Dhi Qar from the drab gray of dictatorship and war to a vibrant future. Outside the building, delegates enjoyed Iraqi meals in a tent decked with paintings by another local artist.

The host pointed out that "Anywhere two Iraqis are gathered, one of them is a poet." This was confirmed when a prominent Nassiriyah poet recited original works by local artists. Participants also viewed a locally-produced documentary film, "Sumerians - From the Ur Civilization to a Marshes Kingdom," on Dhi Qar's Marsh Arabs, their culture, their persistence in the face of Saddam Hussain's violent repression and their vibrant culture deeply-rooted in their Sumerian heritage.

That evening the participants enjoyed a sumptuous Iraqi feast and cultural presentation at the newly reopened Ziggurat Convention centre. The Nassiriyah band accompanied an original play written by a local playwright and performed by Dhi Qar actors. It was a touching performance communicating the profound dedication required to stay in Iraq and start over after so much pain and suffering.

The audience for the public events included the IRFFI participants and a cross-section of the principal movers and shakers of Dhi Qar. Provincial Governor Aziz Alwan, Provincial Council Chairman Ihsan Al-Taei and Iraqi Army 10th Division Commander Major General Habib in their speeches reiterated their determination to provide security and good governance and their willingness to work closely with international donors to ensure development.

The IRFFI presenters described the broad range of development projects they are implementing in Dhi Qar. They emphasized that the good security situation and committed provincial government make Dhi Qar one of the most desirable venues in Iraq for successful development.

During the discussion, a consensus emerged that the UN can no longer rely on "remote management" from outside the country, and must move its operations inside Iraq and work on the ground with local government on a daily basis.

All agreed that the government of Iraq now has sufficient development funds and no longer needs large inputs of foreign cash donations. The focus has shifted to more "co-funded" projects, in which the Iraqi government matches foreign monetary contributions. Iraq is also totally funding its own development projects.

As a result donors must change their emphasis to "capacity building," and are now working closely with the Iraqi government to provide training and expertise to ensure that Iraqi funded projects are successful over the long term.

Having seen the Dhi Qar PRT, the participants were convinced that there was a need for more UN visibility in Iraq and that one way to assure this outcome was by thoroughly "integrating" UN operations with those of the PRTs.

They left Dhi Qar determined to share more information with the PRTs regarding their development activities in the country and to seriously examine the possibility that UN representatives could be "embedded" into the PRTs in the future, as a first step towards the day when UN operations will be up and running on the ground all over Iraq.